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Thomas Wolfe of North Carolina

Edited by

H. G. Jones

NORTH CAROLINIANA SOCIETY IMPRINTS
NUMBER 6

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H. G. Jones, Editor

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No. 6. *Thomas Wolfe of North Carolina* (1982)
Edited by H. G. Jones

Thomas Wolfe of North Carolina

Papers and Reminiscences Delivered at the Second Annual Meeting of the Thomas Wolfe Society, Chapel Hill, 10-11 April 1981

Edited by

H. G. Jones

Chapel Hill
NORTH CAROLINIANA SOCIETY, INC.
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INTRODUCTION

The Thomas Wolfe Society — the genesis of which is traced in Richard Walser's "Wolfe on the Move" in *The Thomas Wolfe Society Membership List, 1981* — held its second annual meeting at the novelist's alma mater, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, on 10-12 April 1981. Members from across the land were joined by thirteen of Thomas Wolfe's schoolmates, each of whom recalled memories of the years 1916-1920 when the tall young man from Asheville shared life on campus with them.

The meeting was opened Friday afternoon in Greenlaw Hall, a new building named for one of Wolfe's teachers. Following a business session presided over by Duane Schneider of Ohio University, Leslie Field of Purdue University delivered a paper titled "*You Can't Go Home Again*: Wolfe's Germany and Social Consciousness." That evening in Graham Memorial — a building named for the president of the University who died while Wolfe was at Chapel Hill — graduate students of the Department of Dramatic Art, under direction of Ann Shepherd, performed a portion of C. Hugh Holman's "37 Octobers." Unfortunately, illness prevented Dr. Holman from attending, and he died a few months later.

On Saturday morning the meeting moved to New West Hall, a building housing Wolfe's literary society where, he once predicted, his own portrait would some day hang. There, on the wall, was indeed the portrait of Thomas Wolfe, painted by Frank Mason in 1979. With Vice-President John L. Idol, Jr., presiding, Sue Fields Ross of Davidson College read a paper titled "Julia E. Wolfe: The Mother and the Memory," and Phillip Hettleman of New York spoke informally on "Thomas Wolfe and the *Tar Heel*." Former Chief Justice William H. Bobbitt, who was unable to remain for the afternoon session, was persuaded to give a brief impromptu talk; and Richard Walser of Raleigh, author of *Thomas Wolfe, Undergraduate* and other works, described Wolfe's association with places to which Mrs. Morton I. Teicher and her associates led the members at the conclusion of the session.

Members in the afternoon viewed an extensive exhibit of Wolfe materials in Wilson Library, named for the librarian familiar to Wolfe, and

then gathered in the North Carolina Collection for papers by H. G. Jones on "The North Carolina Collection and Thomas Wolfe" and Frances A. Weaver on "The Thomas Wolfe Collection." There, under Douglas Gorsline's portrait of Wolfe (given to the Collection by Phillip Hettleman), twelve schoolmates and an early friend told of their "Memories of Thomas Wolfe": Paul and Elizabeth Green, Albert and Gladys Coates, Phillip Hettleman, Nathan Mobley, Benjamin Cone, Ralph D. Williams, William H. Andrews, Katherine Robinson Everett, Vance E. Swift, Corydon P. Spruill, and R. Hobart Souther. It was one of Paul Green's last public appearances; he died on 4 May.

Members gathered that evening in the Morehead Building for a reception and banquet arranged by a committee under the chairmanship of Frances Weaver. The speaker was Joseph M. Flora, the newly elected chairman of the University's Department of English. His topic was "Thomas Wolfe at NYU: His Friendship with Vardis Fisher." Each member in attendance was given a numbered copy of a special edition of Michele Chessare's line and wash drawing of Thomas Wolfe — a souvenir from the North Carolina Collection — and President Schneider adjourned the meeting by announcing that the 1982 sessions would be at Harvard University.

The North Caroliniana Society and the North Carolina Collection, cosponsors of the meeting, are pleased to publish all but one of the formal papers (Professor Ross's was not available) and all of the reminiscences as Number 6 in the *North Caroliniana Society Imprints* series. Included also is a paper by Moses Rountree, a classmate, who was unable to attend the meeting. *Thomas Wolfe of North Carolina* is our way of commemorating the 1981 meeting of the Thomas Wolfe Society and of celebrating the influence of Thomas Wolfe in the literature of the state. Like other *North Caroliniana Society Imprints*, this one is published in a numbered edition of five hundred copies, none of which is for sale. However, as long as the supply lasts, a copy will be presented upon request to each donor of ten dollars or more to the North Caroliniana Society, the private non-profit corporation that helps support the North Carolina Collection of which the Thomas Wolfe Collection is a part.

The editor expresses appreciation to Chancellor Christopher C. Fordham III for allocating funds to assist in covering expenses of the meeting; the Dialectic and Philanthropic Societies for hosting the morning session; Ann Shepherd and her students for providing the evening performance; Frances Weaver for mounting the fine exhibit of Thomas Wolfe materials;

the officers of the Thomas Wolfe Society and the staff of the North Carolina Collection for their support and encouragement; and the speakers who consented to have their remarks published. Paul Gitlin, administrator of the Estate of Thomas Wolfe, has given this publication his blessings, and his permission provides the editor an opportunity for public acknowledgment of Mr. Gitlin's cordial and helpful cooperation in the administration of the Thomas Wolfe Collection in the North Carolina Collection.

H. G. JONES

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University of North Carolina Library
Chapel Hill 27514

THOMAS WOLFE

Line and Wash Drawing by Michele Chessare, 1979

(Original owned by North Carolina Collection)

*LESLIE FIELD**

You Can't Go Home Again: Wolfe's Germany and Social Consciousness

In his four large novels and two collections of stories, Wolfe dwelled on a few themes, which, in *The Story of a Novel*,[1] he pointed out had been *central* to his writings: his various concepts of time, the "Where Now?" motif, and man's search for a spiritual father. In the speech he gave at Purdue University in 1938,[2] he said that these earlier themes were no longer crucial. Entries in his notebooks[3] and letters[4] echo this assertion. He noted that as a beginning writer he had been too egocentric, too much the sensitive artist divorced from his environment. Late in his young life he saw the need for looking outside of himself, for looking at the political, social, and economic world, and for trying to understand it, assimilate it, and somehow to bring it into his own writing. This movement away from narcissism he attempted in his last novel, *You Can't Go Home Again*.[5]

In many ways *The Web and the Rock* is fictionalized autobiography with protagonist George Webber playing Thomas Wolfe, as were the first two books with the earlier counterpart, Eugene Gant. But in *The Web and the Rock* Wolfe seems to be moving outside himself to a new social awareness, a new social consciousness of people and institutions that are not simply projections of Thomas Wolfe.

With *You Can't Go Home Again*, Wolfe goes even farther in this direction. Episodically, the novel's protagonist involves himself with a variety of people, places, and ideas. Early on George Webber resumes his life with Esther in New York. He awaits publication of his first novel. He returns home for a visit and has a reunion with a boyhood friend, Nebraska Crane, a professional baseball player. He meets Judge Rumford Bland, a usurer whom he used to know. He ruminates on all that has gone wrong in the town he grew up in. Then he returns to New York. Wolfe has chapters

on the Jack family in their fashionable New York apartment. A party featuring Piggy Logan and a fire at the Jacks's assume symbolic proportions as Wolfe contrasts the haves and have nots in depression United States.

Further episodes involve George's trip to England and Germany. In England he has a wildly kaleidoscopic time with Lloyd McHarg, supposedly fashioned on Sinclair Lewis, and on his last trip to his beloved Germany George sees the face of evil in the Nazis who lionize him, preen for the Olympic Games, and smash in the heads of Jews on the side streets of Berlin and Munich. "I have a Thing to Tell You" (which initially appeared as a separate piece in *The New Republic*)[6] is a poignant picture of man's inhumanity to man, the Nazi persecution of the Jew. Finally we have "Ecclesiasticus" and the "Credo," on which the book ends.

Some of Wolfe's finest expressions of social awareness emerged in *You Can't Go Home Again*. Much of this social awareness or social consciousness involves Wolfe's attitude toward Germany and the Jews. Was Wolfe anti-Semitic? In a very real sense his fiction and especially his letters and notes do reveal bigotry and prejudice. Moreover, in his seven trips to Germany he discovered in himself a strong affinity for Germans and Teutonic culture — long before he discovered his America. Yet in "I Have a Thing to Tell You," which reappeared as a climactic epiphany in the last part of *You Can't Go Home Again*, Wolfe sees the evil behind the mask of Germany, and senses at once that anti-Semitism and humanity are incompatible.

George Webber, having returned to his beloved Germany as a famous author, is now on a train leaving it once more. At Aachen, the last stop before the border, he and other travelers in his compartment are shocked that one of their fellow passengers — a nervous little man, whom George had privately called Fuss-and-Fidget — had been seized by the authorities. The rumor circulates that he is a Jew caught trying to escape with all of his money. As the terrified little man tries to persuade the officers to let him go, he is led past his traveling companions, his eyes glancing at them for just a moment. But he does not betray them by showing in any way that he knows them, and they board the train, leaving him behind on the platform. "He looked once, directly and steadfastly, at his former companions, and they at him. And in that gaze there was all the unmeasured weight of man's mortal anguish" (*YCGHA*, p. 699). Wolfe wrote this in the 1930s, some time before the rest of the world took seriously the plight of the Jew, and well before one heard the terms *final solution, collective guilt*, and *The Holocaust*.[7]

Wolfe was gaining in knowledge and sensitivity, but his perception that "you can't go home again" did not break his spirit; indeed, strangely enough, it heartened him. Life is change, he felt, and therefore we can improve it. His final credo, in the last pages of his novel, is no defeated whine or whimper. The loss of false illusions, he said, is only the way to new belief. Here is Wolfe's conclusion:

> I believe we are lost here in America, but I believe we shall be found. And this belief . . . is . . . not only our own hope, but America's everlasting, living dream. I think the life which we have fashioned in America, and which has fashioned us . . . was self-destructive in its nature, and must be destroyed. I think these forms are dying, and must die, just as I know that America and the people in it are deathless, undiscovered, and immortal, and must live.
>
> I think the true discovery of America is before us. I think the true fulfillment of our spirit, of our people, of our mighty and immortal land, is yet to come. I think the true discovery of our democracy is still before us. And I think that all these things are certain as the morning, as inevitable as noon . . . . Our America is Here, is Now, and beckons us, and . . . this glorious assurance is not only our living hope, but our dream to be accomplished. (*YCGHA*, p. 741)

Thus does Wolfe's long, posthumous work end optimistically as a celebration of America that he knew and loved. He saw the face of evil all around him but he insisted in his fictional letter to Foxhall Edwards/Maxwell Perkins that "we must deny it all along the way."

Richard Kennedy in *The Window of Memory* does a remarkably comprehensive analysis of the ambience for *You Can't Go Home Again.* In a section called "A Political Awakening: I Have a Thing to Tell You," Kennedy details a chronological and psychological context for this period of Wolfe creativity. Kennedy sums up this way: For most of his life, Wolfe was not a politically minded person. Even though he had been to Europe, including Germany, a few times, "he knew more about European restaurants than about European social problems."[8] In short, Wolfe's attitudes toward Germany and his knowledge of the German political system had been superficial up to about 1935. He had had "casual contacts" with Germans, resented some of the arrogance he observed among them, and dismissed samples of German materialism as vulgar Babbittism. But still Wolfe "had come to love Munich and the southern Germanic people of Austria. In his writing he began to identify his father's country in southern Pennsylvania with a Germanic cleanliness, generosity, and vitality."[9]

But when Wolfe went to Germany in 1935, he saw a change: Nazism and evil had begun to seep into the very fibre of the German soul.[10] Kennedy goes on to acknowledge that "*I Have a Thing to Tell You* is a well-defined mark in Wolfe's career in both thought and composition. In order to purge himself of guilt for having been deceived by the veneer of Nazism, Wolfe acknowledges the claim of human brotherhood with a strength that his self-centered individualism had not allowed to emerge before."[11]

That which now appears as Wolfe's last publications is significant ideologically, aesthetically, and bibliographically. Over the years much has been made of the posthumous Wolfe works. Most recently John Halberstadt, writing in the *New York Review of Books* and the *Yale Review*,[12] raises the big question once again: Who put together Thomas Wolfe's posthumous books? He argues that what we have today in *The Web and the Rock*, *You Can't Go Home Again*, and *The Hills Beyond* is as much the creation of Aswell, Wolfe's last editor, as it is of Wolfe. Maybe more. Perhaps. I don't wish to explore that controversy now. Suffice it to say that before Halberstadt, Kennedy, Holman, Field, Reeves, Rubin and others pointed out in one way or another that the Wolfe in these posthumous books is not the Wolfe who wrote *Look Homeward, Angel.* Creative and perhaps even freewheeling editing have given us twice as much Wolfe fiction as we would have had had we relied solely on the material Wolfe saw into print before he died. Some of this editing may be akin to what we now associate with *Billy Budd* or *The Mysterious Stranger.* That is, a well-meaning attempt by editors, in this instance Edward Aswell, to give us a text that we otherwise would not have had. Or it may be a shoddy bit of editorial commercialese. Time will tell.

However, a central fact does remain: Wolfe's *Look Homeward, Angel* was written in a subjective, romantic vein. As a beginning writer he worked introspectively and egotistically — very much from within. Later, in the 1930s, like Whitman, he used autobiography to move from the *I* to America, Europe, and the cosmos. His letters, notebook jottings and statements, plans for his forthcoming books in the 1930s were often repetitious, fuzzy, ill-defined. But a common denominator does emerge: In this period Wolfe was conscious that he wanted to move away from his earlier subjective mode of writing typified by *Look Homeward, Angel.* He was moving on to something else. And that something else was a sense of social consciousness, objectivity, and a belief in "you can't go home again" in all of its ramifications.[13]

In Wolfe's *Notebooks* we have ample evidence that he had been worrying about his new direction for some time. For example, in a section called "Political and Social Notes: 1937-1938," Wolfe darts back and forth as he considers dictatorship, socialism, democracy, and other forms of government. In a piece called "A Spanish Letter," which he never mailed, Wolfe wrestled with many forms of government, including Fascism. In a somewhat revised form this material was included in Chapter 38 of *You Can't Go Home Again (Notebooks*, pp. 901-14).

In typically rambling fashion Wolfe covers much ground in his "Spanish Letter." First he goes back to his roots, North Carolina, and his hard-working stone-cutter father, the solid conservative outlook of his family, then to his own lyrical writing and juvenile conflicts with his environment, his early limited view of the artist and his society, his breaking away from his romantic egocentric artistic view of life, his ultimate break with his locale:

> You can't go home again — back to your childhood, back to the father you have lost, back to the solacements of time and memory — yes, even back to art and beauty and to love. For me, at any rate, it is now manifest that they are not enough. And I do not think that this be treason . . . . (*Notebooks*, p. 904)[14]

Wolfe went on to say in this long letter that he had left his home in North Carolina, had wandered the streets of Brooklyn, had written much, had visited Germany, for which he felt a special love, had gone back to New York, and then had returned to Germany. Finally, he said, he discovered that Germany had changed. Germany was still golden, and he was embarking upon a glorious career, but something was wrong. He met friends, saw signs, felt something. And ultimately he saw a picture of Germany that he had never seen before: He began to see and feel and experience "the full horror" of that which had never before been part of life.

> This was the picture of a great people who were spiritually sick, psychically wounded: who had been poisoned by the contagion of an ever-present fear, the pressure of a constant and infamous compulsion, who had been silenced into a sweltering and malignant secrecy, until spiritually they were literally drowning in their own secretions, dying from the distillations of their own self poison, for which now there was no medicine or release. (*Notebooks*, 907)

Wolfe still felt in 1935 that the German people had a noble heritage. As difficult as life was then, they still reached out in order to share cultures

of the past and those around them in the present. He saw that the Germans were still immersed in literature and the arts. But Wolfe also sensed that even this semblance of the old Germany was rapidly disappearing.

> Everywhere about me, as time went on during that spring and summer of 1935, I saw the evidence of this dissolution, this shipwreck of a great spirit, this miasmic poison that sank like a pestilential fog through the very air, tainting, sickening, blighting with its corrosive touch, through fear, pressure, suppression, insane distrust and spiritual disease, the lives of everyone I met. It was, and was everywhere, as invisible as a plague, and as unmistakable as death; it sank in on me through all the golden singing of that May, until at last I felt it, breathed it, lived it, and knew it for the thing it was. (*Notebooks*, p. 909).

Wolfe returned to Germany one last time, in 1936, and he noted that "the pestilence of the year before had spread and deepened" (*Notebooks*, p. 909). It was the time of the Olympic Games in Germany, and Wolfe described in great detail the magnificence and pagentry of the games, which signified the power and preeminence of Germany. And then he contrasted this with the other spectacle —

> . . . great displays of marching men, sometimes ungunned but rhythmic, great regiments of brown shirts swinging through the streets; again, at ease, young men and laughing, talking with each other, long lines of Hitler's bodyguards, black-uniformed and leather-booted, the Schutz-Staffel men, stretching in unbroken lines from Leader's residence in the Wilhemstrasse up to the arches of the Brandenburger Tor; then suddenly the sharp command, and instantly, unforgettably, the liquid smack of ten thousand boots as they came together, with the sound of war. (*Notebooks*, p. 913)

Thus did Wolfe see the complete corruption of his beloved Germany, his second home. And it sickened him as he realized with a sorrowful heart that he could not go home again.

By February, 1938, Wolfe had apparently roughed out the contents of what was to be the novel we know as *You Can't Go Home Again.* The long synopsis or statement of purpose, although designed for Edward Aswell's eyes, was not seen by Aswell until after Wolfe's death. As we know, much controversy still exists concerning whether Wolfe's posthumous publications were well-served by his editors at Harper's.[15]

At any rate, Wolfe's "Statement" talks of a book which he plans to be a "process of discovery." He says:

> . . . the whole book might almost be called "You Can't Go Home Again" — which means back home to the father one has lost, back home to romantic love, to a young man's dream of glory and of fame, back home to exile, to escape to "Europe" and some foreign land, back home to lyricism, singing just for singing's sake. . . . — back home to the escapes of Time and Memory. (*Notebooks*, p. 939)

Wolfe goes on to say that he is planning a "hopeful" book, an optimistic view of life. Moreover, he intends this to be "the most objective book that he has ever written, and he also intends . . . [paradoxically] for it to be the most autobiographical" (*Notebooks*, p. 939). In this long statement Wolfe speaks of himself as author in the third person. It gives him a chance to stand at some distance from himself as he describes the self he once was, the self who wrote the earlier fiction such as *Look Homeward, Angel.* It gives him an opportunity to expound once more on his *use* of autobiography:

> Autobiographically, therefore, he [the protagonist] should bear perhaps about the same relationship to the life of the author, as Wilhelm Meister bears to the life of Goethe, or as Copperfield bears to the life of Dickens: as to the story itself — the legend — it should bear about the same relation to the life of the author . . . even perhaps as Don Quixote bears to the life of Cervantes — although this book is perhaps more in the vein of satiric legendry than the book the author has in mind. (*Notebooks*, p. 942)

Leo Gurko points out that "the subject matter [of *YCGHA*] is aggressively sociological, at times grimly so. The two great experiences of the 1930s — the depression and the rise of the Fascist empires — are more vividly present than were earlier contemporary events in the preceding novels."[16] Gurko says this book may very well be Wolfe's "depression novel." Moreover, he goes on, "An instructive view of Wolfe in his last stage can be gained by comparing *You Can't Go Home Again* with *The Grapes of Wrath*, another depression novel. . . ."[17] Although Gurko sees great differences between the two books, he does posit some striking parallels that are intriguing:

> The two novels wonderfully reflect the two movements of the thirties: the contraction at the start and the expansion at the end. One can say that Rose of Sharon offering her milky breast to the starving man on the last page of *The Grapes of Wrath* is a metaphor of the sentiments expressed in Wolfe's credo on the last pages of *You Can't Go Home Again.*[18]

Wolfe's experiences, his life in the South and the city, his observation of aesthetes and the wealthy, and the vivid impressions he had of the depression, progressively molded and enlarged his critical awareness of life outside himself. He gained a new insight into American society and into man himself; but he needed further experiences for the maturation of his social consciousness: Germany conveniently provided him with these. Wolfe himself recognized that the way to find America was to leave it.[19] Oddly enough, his sojourns in Europe — especially in Germany — led him by a straight path to an augmented awareness of America.

Wolfe's feeling about Germany up to perhaps 1936, or even 1937, parallels his expression in "Dark in the Forest, Strange as Time" (in his *From Death to Morning* collection): that is, an almost mystical feeling of kinship for Germany and the Germans, to which the Germans seemed instinctively to respond. Wolfe's novels were popular in Germany both with the critics *and* the reading public.[20] In 1935 German cultural life was highly controlled by the Nazis, and Wolfe's appeal was not to the Nazis, "but in spite of them."[21] In the mid-thirties there existed a potent and dangerous underground current, "Die Stillen im Lande," generated by people of all classes and professions who, in disgust with the party principles of National Socialism and the inclusion of these values in contemporary German letters, quietly and unobtrusively rebelled by turning to American and British literature.[22] It was to this responsive and sensitive group that Wolfe appealed. Wolfe became a legendary figure in Germany during his 1935 visit. His appeal lay, by and large, in the "implicit romanticism" of his early works.[23] To the Germans he symbolized an era "when great writers were great men. Something of the angel and the demon in him . . . gave back to the intellectual and creative people of Berlin a sense of their past, of the dignity and power and freedom of a mind not under stress."[24] Wolfe, quite naturally, was influenced by this German enthusiasm, and his final awareness of the sickness of Germany hurt all the more because of the warmth and love the Germans had bestowed upon him and because he had so loved his dark Helen.[25]

Those who knew Wolfe seem to agree that in 1935 he did not or could not recognize what was happening to Germany. Ledig-Rowohlt (depicted as Franz Heilig in *YCGHA*) recalls that, during Wolfe's 1935 trip to Germany, their conversations were primarily unpolitical. And, says Rowohlt, Wolfe was carried away by the adulation of his German friends to the extent that "his political skepticism was still glossed over by joy at his literary success; and besides, he loved Berlin more than any other Euro-

pean capital.''[26] Wolfe in 1935 was so bewitched by his German fame that he was not then overly critical of the Nazis, accepting ''surface impressions'' of Hitler's Germany.[27] Wolfe's 1935 mood has been explained as a ''state of delirium'' induced by personal experiences. *Of Time and the River* had just been published and proclaimed a success. Wolfe's exuberance over this good fortune released months and years of pent-up anxiety, and ''everything . . . [took on] the proportions of a gigantic and infinitely beautiful dream.'' His trips to Germany heightened this euphoria. He left this land of magical dark beauty ''with many of his illusions intact, though some were wavering.''[28] In a letter to Maxwell Perkins, in which he describes his impressions of Germany in 1935, Wolfe tells of the changes he has witnessed in the Germans. He is hurt, puzzled, and somewhat mystified by the metamorphosis which he recognizes connotes only evil. But, Wolfe warns, this evil is not isolated: it affects the entire world: ''But more and more I feel that we are all of us bound up and tainted by whatever guilt and evil there may be in this whole world and that we cannot accuse and condemn others without in the end coming back to an accusal of ourselves.''[29] He describes with heartfelt pain the German towns overrun with marching soldiers, contrasting this image with a picture of the sun ''shining all day long and the fields the greenest. . . .''[30] Thus, there were creeping in on Wolfe in 1935 incipient doubts about Germany, and the next year he returned there, soberer, ''eager to learn what lay beneath the surface of Nazi success and effectiveness.''[31]

Publicity of international events and figures was permitted in Germany in 1936 because of the Olympic Games being held there that year. Wolfe's German publisher shrewdly used this opportunity to publicize Wolfe and his novels, although Wolfe ''made no secret of what he thought of Hitler's activities.'' The aura of secrecy and intrigue in Germany that year engulfed even Wolfe. He became attracted to a blonde artist who later made an unflattering drawing of him, which Wolfe indignantly berated as giving him a ''Schweingesicht.'' Then, according to Rowohlt, Wolfe in all seriousness suspected that the blonde had been bribed by the Gestapo to caricature him. Rowohlt explains this ludicrous situation: ''Lately he [Wolfe] had come across so many frightening details about the National Socialist regime that he, too, began to suffer under the weight of personal mistrust and political suspicion.''[32] And Wolfe even suspected his publishers of machinations against him because in 1936 his novels were not selling as well in Germany as they had earlier.[33]

Actually, Wolfe was quite concerned that year with the ''Dark Messiah,'' Hitler. He had seen Hitler at the games, and from Martha

Dodd, the daughter of the American ambassador to Germany, he had received information about Hitler which made him more informed about Hitler's deeds than the Germans were. Wolfe, says Rowohlt, had no optimistic illusions in 1936 about Germany and feared more mischief was inevitable; and "he realized bitterly that everywhere the men of good will were being oppressed by the men of power, and that Hitler was unleashing nothing but evil in the world."[34] Wolfe learned much from Rowohlt. With the American, Rowohlt discussed personal troubles and pressing social problems, such as the infringement of civil liberties by the Nazis. "Through my own example," Rowohlt tells, "it became particularly clear to him how much the tyranny of National Socialism forced us to abandon our individual rights," how much the German people were being pushed into the position where communication among them was difficult.[35]

Rowohlt encouraged Wolfe to write a novel, not as a propagandist but as a novelist appealing "to the conscience of mankind." However, recalls Rowohlt, Wolfe merely smiled, and indicated that because he loved mankind above all else "he would be obliged to be political in such a book,"[36] the "book" being the story/essay he called "I Have a Thing to Tell You." At least one thing is certain about his story: it showed that Wolfe had resolved his emotional and intellectual difficulties about Fascism by 1937, for "I Have a Thing to Tell You" is a categorical repudiation of Nazism; and Wolfe, writing to a friend, claimed that the story showed his break with the Reich.[37]

Though the story was a worthwhile, timely, and necessary revelation of the ills of Nazism, Wolfe endangered his friends, particularly Rowohlt, whom he depicted as Franz Heilig. Few readers of Rowohlt's *American Scholar* article on Wolfe's last stay in Germany will be unmoved by Rowohlt's description of his emotions in 1937 when Martha Dodd suggested that he read *The New Republic.* Reading "I Have a Thing to Tell You," he was instantly aware that Wolfe had transcribed their conversations "with phonographic exactness," and had rendered Heilig's biographical data correctly as Rowohlt's. The rending thing for Rowohlt was that Wolfe had pictured Heilig "with all the inner contradictions that the tactical juggling of those years involved and that he, as an American, simply could not understand." Wolfe, though, probably understood that he was endangering the lives of his friends as well as his own position in Germany, but felt that he must place truth and integrity foremost. Rowohlt describes the situation as follows: "Here indeed, a writer had

seized on an outstanding political situation, had 'written what he had to write,' and had made his appeal to the conscience of mankind."[38]

Rowohlt had warned Wolfe that the Nazis would blacklist his books if he wrote anything politically tinged against Nazism. As predicted, his books were banned by the Nazis until it was decided "that the circulation of *The New Republic* was not such as to foment any considerable anti-Nazi sentiment."[39] It is ironic that Wolfe, whose appeal to the Germans for so long lay in the "implicit romanticism and unpolitical humanism" of his earlier works, whose novels, the Germans felt, "stood apart from national and international issues of the day and operated in a non-political frame of reference that was neither Nazi or anti-Nazi,"[40] should have his books blacklisted for several months because he offended the sensibilities of the Nazis by finally writing a story with unguarded and intentional political overtones which hardly sanction National Socialism.

The change which 1936 Germany wrought in Wolfe is reflected in the basic attitudes he held late in life and subsequently espoused in the fiction published posthumously. *You Can't Go Home Again* is Wolfe's most politically minded work. A convincing argument has been made that the basis of his earlier works was "vitalism"[41] — that is, an attitude which does not "express itself in social or political terms," an attitude which emphasizes life as "an all-pervasive force," which expresses itself through feeling rather than "theoretical application." It is a type of Nietzschean will to power, "a wish to overpower, a wish to overthrow," to expand, absorb, dominate everything. Compare, for instance, Eugene Gant's Faustian desire to know and have everything with George Webber's later view to see the similarity between Nietzsche's and Wolfe's "vitalism." The young Wolfe, also like Nietzsche, has contempt for the masses or "manswarm." Wolfe had considered himself an individual superior to and above the masses, who lack vitality; but he admired the Munich beer-hall crowd, for to him they were a vital collective entity; and the Olympic Games, with their "collective vitality" impressed him. But when Wolfe became aware of the evils in Germany — racism, worship of force, anti-intellectual suppression of truth — he related these evils to the qualities he found in himself and his own work. Realizing that Nazism is atavistic, he rejects similar primitivistic, vitalistic tendencies, concluding that man cannot return to sub-rationality; and therefore he must repudiate his own individualism. This repudiation of vitalism must bring about a recasting of personality. Wolfe must now give his brain complete control; his "critical intelligence" must constantly be in the fore. That is, he must now become

a thoroughgoing socially conscious thinker and writer. Wolfe had indeed assumed a heavy artistic role. For the remainder of his short life he would faithfully adhere to this stance in his fiction. But he refused to sacrifice his imagination on the altar of fact. Thus did he become obsessed with the translation of "fact" into the "substance of poetic truth."[42]

Wolfe's social criticism may seem naive, superficial, and emotional, but Wolfe was attempting to mature, to develop a social consciousness, and to temper the emotional extravagance, the prejudices of his earlier works with "critical intelligence." The lack of "movement and color, individuality and magnificence" in *You Can't Go Home Again* and *The Hills Beyond* compared with his earlier writing is perhaps a result of Wolfe's inhibition of vitalism in these later works in favor of a cooler and more critical objectivity.[43] Before 1937, for example, he could write in his notebook a vindication of Hitler's government because in Germany "you are free to speak and write that you do not like Jews and that you think Jews are bad, corrupt, and unpleasant people. In America you are not free to say this" (*Notebooks*, p. 829). But in 1937 he could write in "I Have a Thing to Tell You" a tragic, sympathetic story of the German-Jew, "Fuss-and-Fidget."[44] This objective treatment of a Jew — who is not characterized as a Jew or described with stereotyped adjectives which (barring a few special exceptions) Wolfe normally attributes to Jews — is remarkable in comparison with Wolfe's earlier depiction of Jews.[45] And it does not seem too farfetched to say that Wolfe seems to have grown in stature, temperamentally and artistically, because he was able in this story to depict a Jew sympathetically and objectively. The border incident, then, is for Wolfe the final piece of the puzzle which he needed to formulate a creed and a positive attitude.

Wolfe was now unflinchingly aware of the evil in man: Hitler was a "recrudescence of an old barbarism," the atavistic propensities in man springing out. Racism, worship of brute force, suppression of truth, resort to lies, myths, contempt for the individual, anti-intellectualism, belief in blind faiths and obedience — "each of these fundamental elements of Hitlerism was a throwback to that fierce and ancient tribalism" which made the Teutons destory the Roman civilization. "That primitive spirit of greed and lust and force had always been the true enemy of mankind" and still is, Wolfe concludes, not only in Germany, but in America, wherever the ruthless "dog-eat-dog" philosophy is sanctioned. Recognizing the evil atavistic tendencies in mankind and in himself, he firmly believes that man, if he is to be saved, cannot go home again — and this

summation of his experiences was the most difficult value judgment he had ever made or had to face (*YCGHA*, pp. 705-706).[46] And at the pinnacle of his development of social consciousness, he finds — significantly enough — that he must reject Fox's credo:

> All of this makes the paradox of our great difference as hard and strange as the paradox of our polarity. And in this lies the root of trouble and the seed of severance. Your own philosophy has led you to accept the order of things as they are because you have no hope of changing them; and if you could change them, you feel that any other order would be just as bad. In everlasting terms — those of eternity — you and the Preacher may be right; for there is no greater wisdom than the wisdom of Ecclesiastes, no acceptance finally so true as the stern fatalism of the rock. Man was born to live, to suffer, and to die, and what befalls him is a tragic lot. There is no denying this in the final end. *But we must, dear Fox, deny it all along the way.* (*YCGHA*, p. 737)

His final credo, expressing a belief in man's ultimate ability to conquer the enemies of greed, lust, atavism, is genuine philosophy and faith, even though many insist that Wolfe reaches an impossible conclusion. It is a culminating faith, its pinnacle based on critical evaluation of the town, the metropolis, the wealthy, the masses; on a critical observation of the consequences of the depression and Nazism; and a value judgment arrived at by a man striving for and finally reaching a social consciousness.

Notes

[1]Thomas Wolfe, *The Story of a Novel* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1936).

[2]William Braswell and Leslie A. Field, eds., *Thomas Wolfe's Purdue Speech: "Writing and Living"* (West Lafayette, Indiana: Purdue University Studies, 1964).

[3]Richard S. Kennedy and Paschal Reeves, eds., *The Notebooks of Thomas Wolfe*, 2 vols. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1970). All subsequent references will be to volume 2 of this edition and will be indicated by *Notebooks* parenthetically in the text.

[4]Elizabeth Nowell, ed., *The Letters of Thomas Wolfe* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1956).

[5]Thomas Wolfe, *You Can't Go Home Again* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1940). All subsequent references will be indicated by *YCGHA* parenthetically in the text.

[6]See *YCGHA*, pp. 691-99, which is a modification but substantially the same material as "I Have a Thing to Tell You," *The New Republic*, 10, 17, 24 March 1937, pp. 132-36, 159-64, 202-07. See also C. Hugh Holman, ed., *The Short Novels of Thomas Wolfe* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1961), pp. 235-78.

[7]To capture the same time frame and the factual context Wolfe alludes to fictionally, see especially Arthur D. Morse, *While Six Million Died: A Chronicle of American Apathy* (New York: Random House, 1968), and Walter Laqueur, *The Terrible Secret: Suppression of The Truth about Hitler's Final Solution* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1980).

[8]Richard S. Kennedy, *The Window of Memory: The Literary Career of Thomas Wolfe* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1962), p. 325.

[9]Kennedy, p. 326. See also *YCGHA*, p. 728 and *Purdue Speech,* p. 69. Significant material concerning Wolfe's German experiences and his attitudes toward Germany appears fictionally throughout books VI and VII of *YCGHA*. The factual source for this material in a variety of forms appears in the following: *Notebooks*, pp. 901-19; *Purdue Speech*, pp. 67-78; and in Nowell's *Letters*, pp. 459-63 ff. See also Elizabeth Nowell, *Thomas Wolfe: A Biography* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1960), pp. 120-27ff.

[10]Kennedy, pp. 328-32.

[11]Kennedy, p. 332.

[12]See John Halberstadt, "Who Wrote Thomas Wolfe's Last Novels?" *The New York Review of Books*, XXVIII (March 19, 1981), 51-52; see also John Halberstadt, "The Making of Thomas Wolfe's Posthumous Novels," *The Yale Review*, 70 (Autumn 1980), 79-99; Eliot Fremont-Smith, "Wolfegate: Of Time, the River, and Fraud." *The Village Voice*, February 25-March 3, 1981, pp. 35, 37; Edwin McDowell, "Paper on Thomas Wolfe Stirs Debate on Scholarship VS Privacy," *The New York Times* (Mon., April 6, 1981), p. 17; Richard S. Kennedy, "The 'Wolfegate' Affair," *Harvard Magazine*, 84 (September-October 1981), 48-53, 62.

[13]See especially *Purdue Speech*, pp. 89ff.

[14]In various forms this material and other *Notebooks* entries dealing with Wolfe's concepts of "you can't go home again" appear in *YCGHA*, pp. 704-43, and in *Purdue Speech*, Appendix I, pp. 89-116.

[15]See Halberstadt, note 12. Halberstadt claims that his dissertation on Wolfe "may not leave the library at Yale in either its book or microfilm form," but if it were permitted to see the light of day, he might prove that Wolfe's posthumous novels were "not really written by Wolfe in the usual sense but were predominantly the work of . . . Edward Aswell."

[16]Leo Gurko, *Thomas Wolfe: Beyond the Romantic Ego* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1975), p. 137.

[17]Gurko, p. 154.

[18]Gurko, pp. 154-55.

[19]See *The Story of a Novel*, p. 30.

[20]See William W. Pusey, III, "The German Vogue of Thomas Wolfe," *The Germanic Review*, XXIII (April 1948), 137-48; Kurt Pinthus, "Culture Inside Nazi Germany," *The American Scholar,* IX (Autumn 1940), 490; and Martha Dodd, *Through Embassy Eyes* (New York: Garden City Publishing Co., 1940), pp. 89-91.

[21]Pusey, p. 140.

[22]Pinthus, p. 490.

[23]Pusey, p. 141. It is interesting to note that the quality for which the Germans admired Wolfe — Romanticism — is the same for which many American critics have rejected him. Years ago Edmund Wilson succinctly summed up the attitude of American critics: "I have never written about Thomas Wolfe, because I find him completely unreadable. I know that he has talent, but his writing is too verbose for me — I admire compactness and terseness — and his swollen imagination is very uncongenial to me. I found last year in Germany that he was enormously popular over there — he is, I suppose, writing in the tradition of German romanticism, but this does not endear him to me." — Edmund Wilson, letter to the present writer, 19 April 1955.

[24]Dodd, pp. 90-91.

[25]See C. Hugh Holman, *The Loneliness at the Core: Studies in Thomas Wolfe* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1975), p. 151.

[26]Henrich Maria Ledig-Rowohlt, "Thomas Wolfe in Berlin," *The American Scholar*, XXII (Spring 1953), 189-91.

[27]Pusey, p. 142.

[28]Dodd, pp. 91-94.

[29]Roger Burlingame, *Of Making Many Books: A Hundred Years of Reading, Writing, and Publishing* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1946), p. 325. Although in his book he does not mention to whom and on what date this letter was written, Mr. Burlingame informed me that Wolfe wrote the letter to Maxwell Perkins on 23 May 1935. To my knowledge, this letter does not appear in any collection of Wolfe or Perkins letters. — Roger Burlingame, letter to the present writer, 18 July 1955.

[30]Burlingame, pp. 325-26.

[31]Dodd, p. 94.

[32]The material in this paragraph comes from Rowohlt, pp. 194-95.

[33]Rowohlt, p. 198.

[34]Rowohlt, p. 196.

[35]Rowohlt, p. 197.

[36]Rowohlt, pp. 196, 199.

[37]Thomas Wolfe, letter to Dixon Wecter, 5 March 1937. See *Letters*, p. 614.

[38]Rowohlt, pp. 200-01.

[39]See George R. Preston, Jr. *Thomas Wolfe, A Bibliography* (New York: Charles S. Boesen, 1943), p. 71.

[40]Pusey, p. 141.

[41]See Bella Kussy [Milmed], "The Vitalist Trend and Thomas Wolfe," *Sewanee Review*, L (July-September, 1942), 306-24. Note that here and elsewhere in this paper Kussy's definition of "Vitalism" is employed; this paragraph is in effect a summary of Kussy's most helpful study.

[42]See especially the *Letters*, p. 751, and the *Purdue Speech*, pp. 54ff.

[43]Kussy, p. 323.

[44]See note 6.

[45]See Paschal Reeves, *Thomas Wolfe's Albatross: Race and Nationality in America* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1968), pp. 39-85. Reeves analyzes Wolfe's "Jews" in five categories: "student, businessman, elite society, lover, and symbol."

[46]See also John Miller Maclachlan, "Folk Concepts in the Novels of Thomas Wolfe," *Southern Folklore Quarterly*, IX (December 1945), 175-86. Maclachlan evaluates Wolfe's observations and conclusions in the light of *kulturgeist.*

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*JOSEPH M. FLORA**

Thomas Wolfe at NYU: His Friendship with Vardis Fisher

Thomas Wolfe's four years at the University of North Carolina were very important in the formation of the writer that was to be. Wolfe responded enthusiastically to much of the college life of "The Hill," as the reader of *Look Homeward, Angel* — not to mention Richard Walser's recent study *Thomas Wolfe, Undergraduate* — can tell. Chapel Hill, Wolfe once said, beat all other towns hollow.

When Wolfe left Chapel Hill after his graduation in 1920 for Harvard, he was intent on becoming a playwright, following an interest he had found at Chapel Hill. But his talent needed a larger scope than the drama, and Harvard M.A. in hand, he next left for New York City, where he started writing what came to be *Look Homeward, Angel.* To help meet expenses, he became an instructor in English at New York University in 1924 and taught there intermittently until 1930. He was not a teacher at NYU in the way that Doris Betts or Max Steele is at Chapel Hill. For most of his stint at NYU, Wolfe was not a known writer, and he was not teaching creative writing: he was in the trenches teaching freshman composition. NYU was not the charming place that Wolfe had found Chapel Hill to be, and he was not seeking to find an alternate or dual career. Writing was always his true mistress.

Fairly late in Wolfe's career at NYU, Vardis Fisher, another aspiring writer, joined the Department of English. He and Wolfe were attracted to each other; as events proved, they had much in common. Both made substantial reputations for themselves in the 1930s as writers of autobiographical fiction, and critics and readers often compared their work. Wolfe's Eugene Gant and Fisher's Vridar Hunter bore some striking similarities. Wolfe, of course, won the greater fame, and his critical reputation

has fared better. He, not Fisher, was included in Jackson R. Bryer's *Fifteen Modern American Authors* (1969), a survey of research and criticism of the top fifteen of the century, so to speak. Yet at the end of the 1930s not everyone would have expected Wolfe to outdistance Fisher as much as he did. Fisher had won much of his reputation in the 1930s with his autobiographical tetralogy: *In Tragic Life* (1932), *Passions Spin the Plot* (1934), *We Are Betrayed* (1935), and *No Villain Need Be* (1936). Shortly after Wolfe's death, Fisher achieved his greatest national approval with the publication of his novel *Children of God*, winner of the 1939 Harper Prize. Thereafter, Fisher's stock began to fall. He started work on a series of twelve novels that would trace western man's religious sense from prehistoric times to modern times, a series to be called the Testament of Man. Interest in Fisher declined as the series progressed. In the final volume of his Testament, *Orphans in Gethsemane* (1960), Fisher modified and expanded his early autobiographical tetralogy, defining a large part of his artistic creed by reference to and portrayal of Thomas Wolfe in fictional guise even as he had appeared fictionally in the earlier *No Villain Need Be.* Although Wolfe's friendship with Fisher at NYU came late in Wolfe's career there, it was very important, and it is worth our time to consider this brief but remarkable exchange. It can tell us much about Wolfe's years at NYU, a great deal about Wolfe — and also a great deal about Vardis Fisher.

Fisher first met Wolfe in early 1929; Fisher, a recent University of Chicago Ph.D., had joined the English faculty of the Washington Square College of New York University during the preceding fall. As an assistant professor Fisher shared an "office" with twenty-five or so others. Although Wolfe was on that faculty, he was in Europe for a fourth visit when the year began but returned for the second semester. Fisher describes Wolfe's return to his New York University office this way:

> My back was to the hall doorway and I did not see him when he came in. I did not see him until he strode past me and dropping a pile of books on a desk across the aisle sank sprawling to a chair. He was so huge, his stride was so long and loose, his dark hair so uncombed, his dark eyes so unhappy and suspicious, and his whole bearing so obviously that of one who felt himself called to an uncommon destiny that I stared at him, fascinated. I felt in him then what he had confessed or was to confess in his books and letters: "By God, I have genius and I shall yet force the inescapable fact down the throats of the rats and vermin who wait for the proof."[1]

Wolfe was not the typical college faculty member, but demonstrated the aloofness of the writer not much interested in being a colleague. Accord-

ing to Fisher, both he and Wolfe detested teaching. Fisher remembers that Wolfe was not often at his desk in the big office where the more traditional academics read papers, prepared classes, and consulted with students. Whenever Wolfe came to his desk, he was, Fisher reports, "restless, impatient, suspicious, eager to be off" (p. 26). Neither spoke to the other on that memorable day. Fisher continued to scrutinize Wolfe, but Fisher tells us that Wolfe never once met his gaze and never said hello. Apparently the silent scrutinizing went on for some time — and not just on that day. Many years later, in writing of their meeting, Fisher describes Wolfe in terms that echo not only the analytical Vridar Hunter of Fisher's tetralogy but the major metaphor of the Testament of Man that Fisher was then in the midst of:

> Well, I knew, of course, that here was an extraordinary person, an extraordinary child, lonely, lost, obsessed, embittered, in the great hulking form of a man. Before I ever exchanged a word with Wolfe I thought I knew a great deal about him. For I was another child, lonely and lost, and I recognized my kin. I also sensed that Wolfe suspected that I was looking deeper into him than he wanted anyone to look. (pp. 26-27)

It is not surprising to me that Fisher made Wolfe break the silence. Fisher reports, "It was inevitable that he should have come to me at last" (p. 27). That sentence tells us more about Vardis Fisher — or at least as much — as it tells us about Thomas Wolfe. Wolfe was the Southerner and came from an expansive, emotion-showing family. Fisher had grown up in an isolated Idaho frontier community. Fisher distrusted emotion — although he was very emotional. His family was not demonstrative. In any event, Wolfe approached Fisher to tell him that he had read *Toilers of the Hills*, Fisher's first novel recently published, and that he liked it. There is probably no better way to start a friendship with a writer who has just published his first book than to praise the book.

Thus, Fisher and Wolfe became good friends. Even in 1951 Fisher could write: "I had indeed more in common with him than I have had with any other friend" (p. 27). Fisher does not say that Wolfe was his best friend, and if we may judge from *Orphans in Gethsemane*, where Fisher presents Wolfe as David Hawke, Wolfe was not his best friend. Indeed, it must be owned that not every reader would judge Fisher's two essays on Wolfe as acts of friendship. One Wolfe critic confided to me that he wished that Fisher's essays on Wolfe had stayed buried in the pages of *Tomorrow* magazine, where they were first published, rather than being reprint-

ed as the name article of Fisher's collected essays, thus becoming a staple in academic libraries throughout the country. Fisher's pieces on Wolfe are moderately famous, but Wolfe scholars seldom quote from them and usually do not list them in their selected bibliographies. By their silence, Wolfe's critics seem to say that Vardis Fisher did not have the key to Thomas Wolfe. Fisher would not be suprised at their silence. He had met such silences often during his lifetime; probably the critics' neglect of his essays would tend to convince him the more of his judgment.

Let us look more carefully at Fisher's portrait of Wolfe, always keeping in mind that it is in ways that Fisher admitted — and perhaps in other ways that he was not aware of — also a portrait of himself. First the admitted part. Fisher notes that both he and Wolfe had childhoods that tortured them and drove them almost to lunacy. He enumerates other similarities:

> . . . the same lonely introversion of spirit; the same fantastically over-developed idealism all tangled up with deep distrust of human motives; the same monstrous self-pity; the same fright and anxieties; the same kind of identification with the opposite sex and hatred of father; the same hatred of mother; the same problem with women; the same contempt for pretentiousness and sham, that came largely from an unhappy recognition of sham in ourselves; the same contempt for most human beings, that was only displaced contempt for self — though this I did not know then and I think Wolfe never learned; the same frenzied desire to prove our worth and leave our name on the page of history, though aware that fame was a bauble, and personal immortality the hope of a ravaged soul; the same gross, offensive and sometimes insufferable egoism that was less egoism than a defense against our overdeveloped submissive tendencies, which in both of us were very strong; the same naked need of spiritual shelters but scorn of formalized religions; and the same tendency to psychic impotence. We were making the same kind of struggle to come out of childhood darkness, but I had at that time recognized that the "door" was only a deeper darkness. (pp. 27-28)

That is quite a catalogue, and there is a lot of truth in it, although often it seems more accurate of Fisher than of Wolfe. We note that Fisher clearly sets himself ahead of Wolfe on the search for self-discovery.

Fisher most faults Wolfe for not getting close enough to Vridar's (that is, his own) position on life — obviously the psychic reason for Wolfe's failure to structure his books, to create novels unaided. Fisher says flatly: "Wolfe simply refused to face up to his repressions and went off half-cocked into ancient superstition-symbols" (p. 29). At the same time, Fisher is not without appreciation for Wolfe's art. He maintains: "The

lyrical overplay was the essence of Wolfe, and far from destroying form gave to his tales a kind of lyrical continuity. All his work lies in the pattern of the lineal flow of time and the river" (p. 38). Wolfe, Fisher thinks, can see others, but not himself: "Wolfe had to write about his friends, and he had to write about them, for the most part, in terms that were not flattering."[2] Fisher can admire some of the caricature.

Fisher identifies Wolfe's major problem as his relationship with his mother. In his essay on Wolfe's relationship with Maxwell Perkins, Wolfe's editor at Scribner's, Fisher presents Perkins as a mother-substitute for Wolfe and presents Wolfe as a son-substitute for Perkins. He explains Wolfe's restlessness very clinically:

> He fled continuously from his mother. He fled from his friends. He had to flee as long as he could not explore, determine, and face his problem. He had to leave Perkins. He had to leave him because, for Wolfe, who carried his heart in his throat and his childhood in his eyes, the relationship had become too intimate and suffocating. He used exactly the right word when he said he felt that he was being controlled. His mother had controlled him as a child, idolized him, fussed and fretted over him, with the result that he developed abnormal dependence on her. His problem was to *realize* himself as an adult standing free and alone in his own strength. Until he could understand that problem — he had to rebel against every mothering person, lest, loathing himself, he abjectly surrender, and return, defeated, as a child to Asheville. (p. 54)

Fisher concludes that Wolfe's personality was bigger than his art. He says: "Self-pity was a disease in him. There is self-pity in any artist but in Wolfe it was a tyrant" (p. 34).

Thomas Wolfe died young, in 1938, a few weeks before his thirty-eighth birthday. The early death has heightened the romantic aura surrounding Wolfe's personality; it has also, inevitably, caused speculation about what shape his career would have taken had he lived. The year after Wolfe's death, Edward C. Aswell, who became Wolfe's editor after Wolfe abandoned Perkins, visited Fisher in Idaho. During the visit Aswell's wife asked Fisher what he thought would have happened to Wolfe if he had lived. Fisher said he thought that Wolfe would have gone insane: "I thought so because to the day of his death, so far as I know, he was not able to understand those tyrannical emotions that made him a wanderer among men" (p. 30). Somewhat paradoxically, Fisher held that emotional maturity would have been the artistic death of Wolfe, judging Wolfe "essentially a poet" (p. 34).

After he left New York University in 1931, Fisher never saw Wolfe again, so their friendship was indeed brief. But it was intense — although probably it was more important to Fisher than to Wolfe, at least for literary purposes. Fisher never ceased to talk about Wolfe, and he used him throughout his career — in his fiction and his non-fiction — to define both what the artist often is and — in reverse — what he should try to become. Fisher felt it incumbent upon himself to place a note before the Table of Contents of his collected essays apologizing to the reader for the abundant references to Wolfe in them: "The author deplores as much as any reader possibly can repetitions of the Wolfe . . . and the Sammy-Eugene-Vridar theme and hopes the reader will bear in mind that these appeared in essays or talks in different years and places. They are so germane to the author's point of view that it has been thought that to delete them would weaken the arguments which they support."

As Fisher reconstructed events, the last time he saw Wolfe was as Wolfe was about to depart for another trip abroad. As he took his leave of Fisher, Wolfe held out his hand and said, "Vardis, don't let the sons of bitches lick you. Keep fighting. . ." (p. 40). Fisher says that as Wolfe turned away there were tears in Wolfe's eyes. But probably Fisher's chronology is a bit remiss here. Wolfe left for Europe again on May 10, 1930, but he was back in New York in February of 1931, Fisher's last term at NYU. It would seem strange if Wolfe and Fisher did not renew their acquaintance. Nevertheless, Fisher's account makes a good point, and it stresses what Fisher felt that the friendship meant to Wolfe.

Was there only admiration for Fisher on Wolfe's part? We can be assured that such was not the case; nor did Fisher think so. Fisher says that he was mainly a listener for Wolfe, a consoler, a receptacle ("Wolfe talked incessantly and I listened" p. 31), but there must have been moments when Fisher leveled with Wolfe. That was his way. Indeed, Fisher admits "there were times — I knew this well — when he hated me" (p. 36). And before he died, Wolfe most certainly had a fair assessment of what Fisher thought of him and his book, for Fisher put Wolfe, under the name Robert Clark, into *No Villain Need Be*, a book that appeared two years before Wolfe's death. Incidents that Fisher described in 1951 as having happened to Wolfe are presented in the novel as happening to Clark, although the picture of Clark is kinder than the picture of David Hawke, the revision of Clark in *Orphans of Gethsemane*.[3] Vridar sees that he and Clark have much in common, and Clark is obviously very childlike. Vridar thinks Clark's first novel "one of the greatest novels that had come out of

American life" and he tells Athene, his second wife, that Clark "has enough power and drive for a dozen writers. If he'll only outgrow the wish of self-glorification; if he'll only learn that stupendous assumptions of zest, overwhelming apostrophes, and heaped and multiplied eulogisms, spring not from zest but are only hunger for it and a disguise of emotional emptiness or a huge emotional conflict. . . ."[4] Is there any doubt about why Wolfe sometimes hated Fisher?

The relationship did not consist wholly of Fisher's meeting Wolfe's needs. As the portrait in *No Villain* suggests, Wolfe tried to encourage Fisher too. In the novel Clark tells Vridar, who is having difficulty getting a publisher for his book, that he should take it to Travis, whose counterpart in life is Maxwell Perkins. Vridar's novel gets from Travis the same disregard that Fisher tells us Perkins gave his manuscript after Wolfe tried to steer Fisher to his editor. We can assume that there was conversation between Fisher and Wolfe about Fisher's work and problems as well as about Wolfe's. Obviously, too, Wolfe talked with Perkins about Fisher. If, as Scott Berg argues, Maxwell Perkins had a parent-son relationship with his three Scribner's giants — Wolfe, Fitzgerald, Hemingway — Perkins found no "son" in Vardis Fisher, nothing to serve his emotional needs. It must be said, of course, that Perkins was looking for talent, and he may simply have found Fisher's insufficient.

Both Fisher and Wolfe could be excellent correspondents. It seems strange, then, that they did not correspond after their last meeting. If Fisher were a mother-figure for Wolfe, as Fisher came to feel, we can only assume there were other persons more important to Wolfe on whom he could unburden himself. If Wolfe had lived, one of the things he might well have done is to give us a caricature of Fisher. Doubtless what Fisher came to write about Wolfe would have made Wolfe gargantuanly angry.

Still we know that Wolfe did not forget Fisher. He tried to locate Fisher on his trip West before that fatal illness, but he was unsuccessful. On June 7, 1938, he wrote from Boise to Elizabeth Nowell, his literary agent even as she was Fisher's (because of Wolfe's intervention), describing to her Fisher's country:

> What I saw . . . is the abomination of desolation: an enormous desert bounded by infinitely-far-away mountains that you never got to, and little pitiful blistered towns huddled down in the most abject loneliness underneath the huge light and scale and weather and the astounding brightness and dimensions of everything — all given a kind of tremendousness and terror and majesty. And this? — their pride and joy, I guess, set in a cup of utterly naked

> hills, a clean little town but with sparseness, a lack of the color, openness, richness of Cheyenne. I've tried to find Fisher: people know him here but he's not in the telephone book. Anyway, what I've seen today explains a lot about him.[5]

Wolfe's last words on Fisher indicate that Wolfe had done a lot of thinking about Fisher's personality too. If Fisher saw Wolfe as plagued and misshapen, Wolfe's mind was also at work and he repaid the compliment.

Secluded in Idaho much of the time after 1931, Fisher did not have much opportunity to meet other writers. In his brief career, Wolfe had had important exchanges with James Joyce, Sinclair Lewis, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Ernest Hemingway, Sherwood Anderson, and countless other writers of lesser stature. And Wolfe gained from the experiences both sources for writing material and also for the development of his own art. One of the reasons for Wolfe's friendships with many of these writers was his editor Maxwell Perkins — who wanted his Scribner's writers to know each other and to help each other.

The closest counterpart to a Maxwell Perkins in Fisher's career would be Alan Swallow, to whom Fisher came late in his career and somewhat in despair midway through the Testament of Man series. Fisher, then in his sixties, had had all kinds of troubles with many publishers. He wondered if Swallow's small Denver firm would be interested in publishing the volumes of his Testament of Man that no one else wanted. Swallow not only agreed to publish the rest of the Testament, but he began to bring back other of Fisher's titles. Swallow was not an editor in the sense that Perkins had been Wolfe's, but he gave an extraordinary amount of support to Fisher's then languishing career. He made Fisher available in cloth and paper. He wrote about Fisher; he helped bring Fisher back into the public eye. And Swallow was active in the development of the Western Literature Association, which would be one means of promoting Fisher's career and of getting Western writers to know each other. If Perkins brought Wolfe into contact with other writers, Swallow did the same for Fisher. But, eventually, Fisher's friendship with Swallow faltered, and its demise proved to be as dramatic as Wolfe's had been with Perkins. *Had* Wolfe lived, he might have seen some interesting patterns, too; he might have framed another interesting presentation of life among the literary using Vardis Fisher as his example.

But that is another story. The point is that from first to last there are great similarities in the careers of these two NYU teachers. Comparisons between Wolfe and Fisher are germane on many counts; certainly Fisher

was aware of many of the affinities. The late events in Fisher's life — especially his final unhappiness with Alan Swallow — suggest how right he was in seeing Wolfe as very like himself. Fisher's later unhappiness with Swallow reminds us of Wolfe's turning from Maxwell Perkins and of his various attacks on Perkins and others. Fisher was himself often consumed with doing battle; he saw the Eastern publishing establishment as a force aligned against the Western writer, and decidedly against himself. He attacked the press as vigorously as Wolfe had, and he often quoted Wolfe's saying that some of the critics were so little that they smelled little. Ultimately, Vardis Fisher shared much of the temperament that he gave to his fictional representations of Wolfe. We still have no definitive account of Fisher's troubles with Alan Swallow, but certainly Fisher's last line in his essay on Wolfe and Perkins is every bit as appropriate for Fisher and Swallow: "But what a pity that it all had to end that way!" (p. 55)

Writers make curious friends sometimes. In his short story "The Denunciation" Hemingway has his writer-narrator confess to an unworthy action and tendency: "But I had given him the shortest cut to having Delgado arrested in one of those excesses of impartiality, righteousness and Pontius Pilatry, and the always-dirty desire to see how people act under an emotional conflict, that makes writers such attractive friends."[6] We may take the fictional moment of the story as Hemingway's recognition of an instinct not always pleasing to him. His contemporaries at Scribner's might agree with Hemingway's narrator. Writers are not always "attractive friends." They often caricature each other, their friends, and their editors. Thomas Wolfe made famous portraits of Sinclair Lewis and Maxwell Perkins, even as his colleagues at NYU had some interesting things to say about him, and one made him a character in his novels. And how pastoral and innocent those rough games make Wolfe's days at Chapel Hill seem! New York was another world.

Notes

[1]Vardis Fisher, "Thomas Wolfe as I Knew Him," *Thomas Wolfe as I Knew Him and Other Essays* (Denver: Alan Swallow, 1963), 25. Other page references to this essay will be cited parenthetically in the text.

[2]Vardis Fisher, "Thomas Wolfe and Maxwell Perkins," *Thomas Wolfe as I Knew Him and Other Essays* (Denver: Alan Swallow, 1963), 50. Other page references to this essay will be cited parenthetically in the text.

[3]The portrait of Wolfe as Robert Clark is in Chapter XII, Part Three, of *No Villain Need Be*; the portrait of Wolfe as David Hawke is in Chapter XVIII of Book II, Part I, of *Orphans in Gethsemane*.

[4]Vardis Fisher, *No Villain Need Be* (Caldwell, Idaho: The Caxton Printers, and Garden City: Doubleday, Doran & Co., 1936), 301.

[5]Elizabeth Nowell, ed., *The Letters of Thomas Wolfe* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1956), 768.

[6]Ernest Hemingway, "The Denunciation," in *The Fifth Column and Four Stories of the Spanish Civil War* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1969), 97.

*Joseph M. Flora is chairman of the Department of English at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He has published *Vardis Fisher* (1965), *William Ernest Henley* (1970), *Frederick Manfred* (1974), and other works in American literature. His paper was read at the banquet on Saturday evening.

*PHILLIP HETTLEMAN**

Thomas Wolfe and the *Tar Heel*

Tom Wolfe once made this statement: "When you're a genius, you do not have to be immaculate." This was his response when he was invited to the dean's house for dinner, and one of his friends told him he should get dressed up, which Tom seldom did.

I got to know Tom quite well in my junior year. His class was 1920, and mine was 1921. When Tom was the editor of the *Tar Heel*, I was one of the associate editors, and I hoped to become business manager the following year. (I did.) I saw a great deal of Tom, for I wrote for the *Tar Heel* and I had breakfast with him once in a while — as a matter of fact, as often as twice a week. Tom was then staying at Swain Hall, and I think it was a great treat for him to go down to Gooch's for breakfast. Of course, if you had breakfast, lunch, or anything else with Tom, you always paid the bill! I don't want you to think that I was all that altruistic, for there was a most important reason for my having breakfast with Tom: I was critical of the *Tar Heel* — not critical of his work, because a lot of it did bring out the genius in Tom, but critical of his attitude toward Nat Gooding who was the business manager.

One of the troubles with the *Tar Heel* at that time was that Tom seldom got the news in on time and almost never finished his writings on time. He would go over to the Seeman Printery in Durham and at the last hour or two finish the paper up. As a result, the *Tar Heel* very often came out on Sunday instead of Saturday. Another difficulty was that Tom wanted to put a great deal of his own writings in the paper, and to make space he would simply throw out some of the ads. That was something that Nat Gooding didn't like at all, and I would tell Tom that a newspaper was a business enterprise, published under the aegis of the athletic association. "It's not just for artists and geniuses like you, and if this paper keeps on losing money, they might drop the paper entirely," I warned

him. Gooding's life with Tom was absolutely miserable. In addition to that, Gooding ran up personal debts of about five hundred dollars. I talked with Charlie Woollen a couple of times in connection with my conversations with Tom, and I told him what the trouble was with the paper. Woollen was in complete agreement and, of course, I wanted to get every angle of the paper because my altruism went to the point that I hoped to be business manger the following year — which I did become. Woollen said that every year the *Tar Heel* had lost for the athletic association thousands of dollars. I told him that if I became business manager, the athletic association would have no liability at all, and if any money was made by the paper it was going to be mine. Woollen was delighted with that.

Dan Grant, the editor, and Jonathan Daniels, the managing editor, were perfectly willing to put in more advertising, and I sold advertising for the paper at about four times the rate that Nat Gooding had been getting. We went on the theory that the paper would always come out on time, and if an ad had been sold, it was going to be in the paper. That for me became a most successful enterprise.

During our breakfasts Tom told me many of his great stories, and he also told me of the things that were most disconcerting to him.

Seeing Frank Mason's portrait on Wolfe there on the wall reminds me of the oft-told story of Tom's election to the Society. Tom confided to me on a couple of occasions how mortified he was that he had talked for thirty-five minutes. Well, he also had a great habit of exaggeration. I don't think he wanted to lie, but it wasn't thirty-five minutes but in fact only twenty-two minutes. Of course his speech ended with the hope and expectation that his portrait would one day hang in this hall, and I am delighted that his prophecy has been fulfilled.

I had quite a few things in common with Tom Wolfe. Tom was a debater; I became a member of the Intercollegiate Debating Team. At one of our practices Tom said to me, "You know, I am a much better debater than you are. How did you become a member of the Intercollegiate Debating Team?" I answered, "You might be a better debater, but I had Albert Coates as my coach!" In many ways Tom could be very critical. While writing on the *Tar Heel*, I won the Burdick prize in journalism, supposedly for doing the best writing on the paper. Tom said to me, "How did you happen to win that prize? You know that I'm a much better writer than you." Well, I was smarter then than I am now, and I responded, "You bet your life you're a much better writer, but they couldn't give it to you because you were Edmund Burdick's roommate."

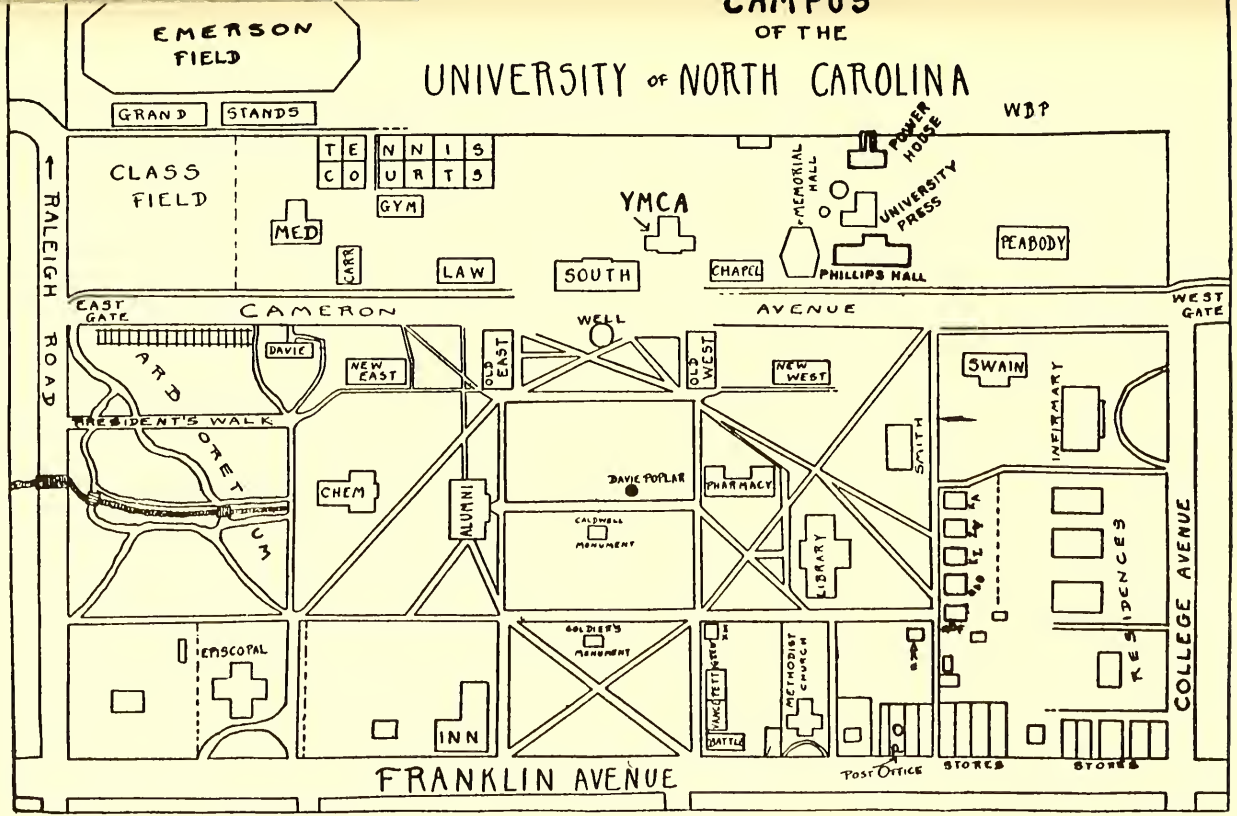
Young Burdick had heart trouble and had to leave the University; he went home and died, and his father established the medal in his son's memory.

I also had a class in journalism with Tom under Mr. Clarence Hibbard, who was a wonderful professor. He was very fond of Tom and forgave all of Tom's idiosyncracies. When Tom began reading an essay to the class, he would pull out four or five pieces of crumpled paper from different pockets and read them. For many of his compositions, he used the backs of advertising bills that he picked up downtown. I will always remember one occasion when Professor Hibbard asked us to write a two-hundred-word composition on a certain subject. As usual, he planned to read some of the best ones to the class. On this occasion Tom turned in an essay of about twenty thousand words, and the professor said, "I would love to read it, but it would take this session and the next one too." So we never heard Tom's essay.

I spoke earlier about Tom's being a genius — and to me in many respects he was. He told me more than once that he expected to write the greatest play ever produced in America and that he would become a rich man writing plays. Well, I think we know him better for his books than for his plays. But last night we had the pleasure of seeing in Graham Memorial the performance based on the words of Thomas Wolfe [Hugh Holman's *37 Octobers*], and it was really a great production.

There is a portrait of Tom Wolfe [by artist Douglas Gorsline] hanging in the North Carolina Collection, which is run by Dr. Jones, and I would like to tell you how it got there. Some years ago I saw a reproduction of the picture in the *New York Times*, and I went up to the gallery that owned the original oil painting and offered to buy it so I could give it to the University of North Carolina. The owner of the gallery told me that the picture had been sold and that the purchaser would pick it up that afternoon. I requested that he tell the purchaser that if he wanted to resell the portrait to me for a profit, I would be interested in buying it. That afternoon the gallery owner called me and reported that the buyer had said, "Well, if he is going to give it to the University of North Carolina, he can have it at the price I paid for it." That painting now hangs in the North Carolina Collection, for it was a great pleasure for me to present it to the Collection in 1975, the year in which Thomas Wolfe, had he lived, would have been seventy-five years old.

*Phillip Hettleman, a member of the UNC Class of 1921, was on the staff of the *Tar Heel* when Wolfe was editor. He is now an investment broker in New York City. This text is an edited transcript of a tape recording of his remarks made at the Saturday morning session.



THE CAMPUS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AS THOMAS WOLFE KNEW IT

(Facing South from Franklin Street)

RICHARD WALSER *

Thomas Wolfe Was Here

Remarks before Taking a Walking Tour of Wolfe's Chapel Hill

To tell the truth, I feel considerably embarrassed. Here I stand on this platform dressed in a Thomas Wolfe T-shirt. To left and right are busts of Justice William H. Bobbitt and Senator Sam J. Ervin, Jr., and over there on the wall is that handsome oil portrait of Wolfe. Yes, indeed, I feel considerably less than properly attired to be in such company.

Be that as it may, I must get on with the assignment given me. This morning we find ourselves having a meeting in New West, a building well known to Wolfe when he was a student on this campus from 1916 to 1920. In those days the campus was not very large, nor were there many students walking the paths from dormitory to classroom. It won't take us long to stroll about the grounds of the University of North Carolina and the nearby streets of the town, looking at the sites he knew. Except for the commercial buildings on Franklin Street, most of those structures which are still standing and with which he was familiar are today, at least on the exterior, unchanged.

That's true of New West: the outside is the same, though the hall of the Dialectic Literary Society was on the second floor in Wolfe's day, not on the third floor where we are at the moment.

Let me tell you how I happen to know about Wolfe's comings and goings on this old campus. Twenty years ago I decided to write a little book about Wolfe's four undergraduate years here at the university. I thought insufficient attention had been given to that formative period in the life of the novelist. I sympathized with every one of Wolfe's excellent biographers who, having to deal with the author's entire career, could devote only fifteen or twenty pages to his Chapel Hill days before moving on to Harvard, New York, Europe, and Brooklyn.

A personal reason for wanting to do the book was that I arrived at the university as a student in 1926, only six years after Wolfe had left. Thus, in spite of some new construction and some changes here and there, the place was not very different from the place Wolfe had known. A lot of the same professors were around still teaching the same courses — doubtless lecturing from the same notecards. You see, I didn't have to familiarize myself with a strange geography or an unknown set of people. It was quite thrifty, I thought, to let my vivid memory substitute for long hours of library research.

And so I began to gather material for the little book I intended to write. One afternoon in the North Carolina Collection in the library here, I was interrupted in my perusal of some Wolfe family papers by a library assistant who came over and said he hoped I would discover all the places Wolfe resided during his Chapel Hill days. "Of course," I said; but why did he want to know? "Oh," he said, "students come in here all the time and ask me where he stayed so that they can go and look at the rooms; but I don't think that anybody has written down where he lived on this campus, and I can't answer their questions." I told him I hoped I would find out, and "write it down."

As a matter of fact, I eventually discovered about ten locations where Wolfe roomed — some five different places during that restless freshman year, and five others later on. As a sophomore, he started out living in Battle #4. I have a story about that.

In one of Aldo P. Magi's early forays into North Carolina, he asked me to drive him from Raleigh over to Chapel Hill so that he might commune with Wolfe's spirit. Ambling along Franklin Street, we were passing Battle Hall and I mentioned Wolfe's connection with it. "Which room?" inquired Aldo. Well, I knew Battle #4 was on the first-floor, left-hand rear. "Let's go and get inside that room," said Aldo. Now, Battle is no longer a student dormitory; it houses university offices of some sort or another.

We moved into the building, angled left-hand rear, and entered a neat, bright office. A polite young gentleman arose from his desk and asked what he could do for us. By this time, Aldo had positioned himself in the center of the room, completely anesthetized, his eyes toward the ceiling. I explained to the young gentleman that we wished nothing but to stand there for a moment or so. "Why?" he wanted to know. I tried to explain to him that Thomas Wolfe had once roomed there. "Thomas — who?"

It was useless to pursue the matter. At that moment, Aldo was in a catatonic state, a half smile on his lips, his gaze reaching far beyond the limits of reality. Obviously, I could get no help from him. From the corner of my eye, I saw the young gentleman move toward his desk and the telephone. *O my God,* I thought, *he's going to call the emergency mental clinic at the university hospital to come get us and throw us into a paddy wagon.* Violently I shook Aldo, who reentered the world gradually as if from some beatific region. I thanked the young gentleman while dragging my companion through the door. Outside in the bright sunshine Aldo wanted to know what all the hurry was about.

Let me say right here that I have no plans to return to Battle #4 in order to commune with Wolfe's spirit. We can all of us commune with Wolfe's spirit right here in New West building where he spent many happy hours at Di Society meetings. And I do hope Wolfe's spirit is present this morning in this chamber to see his portrait hanging on the wall beside that of Governor Zeb Vance, another mountain man from Buncombe County. I need not recount the oft-told story of freshman Wolfe's prophesying that one day his portrait would be up there on the wall beside Zeb Vance's. And so it is.

But let's get on with the walking tour. We'll descend the stairs, leave New West at the north entrance. In front of us will be the old library (now Hill Music Hall), where Wolfe attended Professor Koch's playwriting classes. On our left will be Swain Hall, where Wolfe ate most of his meals. A few steps away on the other side of Cameron Avenue, the main street through the old campus, is Gerrard Hall, where Wolfe was restive under the "inspirational" talks at morning chapel exercises; and several steps farther is the YMCA, where Wolfe passed many a night asleep on a sofa after studying or participating in "bull sessions." The Old Well is on this side of the street, looking exactly the same now as in Wolfe's day, when it was the center of the campus and the place for student gatherings between classes. Wolfe was almost always there. Beyond the Old Well is Old East, oldest state university building (1793) in America, and there Wolfe attended Edwin Greenlaw's English classes. A bit to the southeast is Bynum Gymnasium, where Wolfe went to dances held on the basketball court.

Back across Cameron Avenue at the northeast corner of New East, we'll have a look at a bronze relief sculpture on a concrete slab designed by Richard W. Kinnaird and erected in 1969 in memory of Thomas Wolfe. Be sure to have your cameras ready.

Nearby is Alumni Hall, in one of whose classrooms Wolfe studied philosophy under his favorite teacher, Horace Williams. At the University Inn (site now of Graham Memorial), Wolfe roomed during his senior year. Across Franklin Street from the Inn were the Pickard Hotel and the Pi Kappa Phi Fraternity House, other locations where Wolfe roomed. Battle Dormitory faced Franklin Street, on which were a number of Wolfe's familiar haunts, including the Post Office, Gooch's Cafe, the Pickwick Theater (movies), and Eubanks Drugstore. Around the corner on College Street (Columbia Street) was the home of Mrs. Eric A. Abernethy, where Wolfe and Edmund Burdick roomed during the winter of his sophomore year; and on around the next corner down west Cameron Avenue was the boarding house of Mrs. Mattie Hardee (now site of Hillel House), where Wolfe first stayed as a freshman.

You'll soon be seeing all the places I've mentioned. Mrs. Morton Teicher and her tour guides have campus maps for each of you. As soon as we're outside New West, she'll divide us into small groups, and we'll be on our way.

*Richard Walser is professor emeritus at North Carolina State University in Raleigh. He has published *Thomas Wolfe: An Introduction and Interpretation* (1961), *Thomas Wolfe, Undergraduate* (1977), *Thomas Wolfe's Pennsylvania* (1978), and numerous other works about North Carolina's literary figures. He was one of the founders of the Thomas Wolfe Society. This is an edited version of the remarks he made at the Saturday morning session preceding a tour of Wolfe-related sites.

*H. G. JONES**

The North Carolina Collection and Thomas Wolfe

I am neither a Wolfe scholar nor a Wolfe collector. On the tenant farm where I grew up there were no books, so I am perhaps the only member of the Thomas Wolfe Society who grew up without reading a book by Thomas Wolfe. A more self-conscious person would not have the nerve to show up at one of these meetings.

But I justify my interest in the Society on two grounds: First, Tom Wolfe was a North Carolinian, and my career has been devoted to commemorating North Carolinians. For instance, about ten years ago when I was Director of the State Department of Archives and History, I observed that we did not administer a single state historic site dealing with the history of tobacco, the state's leading economic product; the history of gold, in the production of which North Carolina led the nation until the gold strike in California in 1848; or the career of a literary figure. I set out to remedy those deficiencies, and today we have Duke Homestead State Historic Site, the Reed Gold Mine State Historic Site, and the Thomas Wolfe Memorial.

"The Old Kentucky Home" — "Dixieland" in Tom's writings — was then operated on a part-time summer schedule by the City of Asheville, so upon studying the potential of the place, I wrote Fred Wolfe to suggest that the house should be restored to its original appearance, staffed with sufficient personnel, and opened on a regular schedule year-round. I offered to attempt to persuade the legislature to appropriate funds for that purpose if he, the last surviving sibling, thought well of the idea.

A prompt reply came from the dining room table of Fred W. Wolfe, 713 Otis Boulevard, Spartanburg. He thought not much at all of the idea.

In fact, wasn't this a ploy typical of Raleigh bureaucrats — to try to stick their noses into matters that were being handled quite satisfactorily locally?

I took a gamble. In my response I ate humble pie, withdrew the suggestion, and said that we certainly would not want to take over anything that adequately was being cared for locally. But I did go ahead and explain why I had been so "forward" in making the suggestion in the first place.

Fred's next letter had an entirely different tone. Maybe you've got something there, he seemed to say. Through further correspondence we agreed to meet in Asheville and spend a day together. At the appointed time I met Fred and Mary, let him talk all day long, and by the time we went to see the city manager in the afternoon it was Fred's idea, not mine, that we were discussing. In fact, I had to keep reminding him that the suggestion that the Thomas Wolfe Memorial become a state historic site was only a proposal — one that would require legislative action and the working out of many details. Nothing I said diminished his enthusiasm.

It was a perfect delight for me to work with Fred over the following months and to guide the bill through the legislature. We became fast friends, and I have a bunch of letters and postcards scrawled on both sides and up and down, always with the specific information that they had been written on either his dining room or his kitchen table.

The second reason for my devotion to the Thomas Wolfe Society results from the fact that I preside over the great "Thomas Wolfe Collection Established by His Brothers and Sisters in Honor of Their Father and Mother, W. O. and Julia E. Wolfe." To this splendid body of family manuscripts have been added over the years the collection of John Skally Terry and items contributed by other kinsmen and friends of Thomas Wolfe or collectors of Wolfeana. I shall leave to Frances Weaver the description of the Wolfe Collection, but I wish to comment on several matters.

The Wolfe Collection grows annually. Not only do we acquire all printed matter by or about Wolfe; we also continue to add to the manuscripts. These additions may be a single item, such as the letter accompanying the autographed copy of *Look Homeward, Angel* that Tom sent to his old fraternity at UNC in 1929, given by classmate Beverly C. Moore; or a large accession such as the papers of Fred Wolfe, which I unloaded in the wee hours of a Sunday morning two weeks ago. I want at this time to express our thanks to the heirs of Thomas Wolfe and especially to the executor of the estate of Fred Wolfe for the care with which they have followed the wishes of the family in regard to the papers of Thomas Wolfe

and of his parents and brothers and sisters. I had never met Fred's executor, Edward C. Gambrell, until two weeks ago when, upon his invitation, I spent two days in Spartanburg with him and his wife Mid, his sons Ed, Greg, and Richard, and daughter Jan. They made me feel right at home in Fred's house, and we worked hard both days in going through a mass of materials. Fred was there with us in spirit, for some of those cigarette burns on the table and floor appeared to have been made during the night, and there were other signs that Fred was keeping his eye on us. You remember, of course, that Fred selected the day of his death so that he could be buried during your annual meeting in Asheville last year. He wouldn't have had it any other way.

With us today from Anderson, S.C., are Effie's son, Ed Gambrell; his wife Mid (a great cook); and his daughter Jan. Would you join me in welcoming and thanking them.

The North Carolina Collection, of which the Thomas Wolfe Collection is a part, is a unique department of the University. We acquire, preserve, and make available, in addition to the Thomas Wolfe Collection, all kinds of printed North Caroliniana — anything published by a North Carolinian regardless of subject, and anything about North Carolina or a North Carolinian regardless of author. You are in the reading room. To your back are the Sir Walter Raleigh Rooms consisting of the interior of an early English house that stood not far from Hayes Barton, Raleigh's birthplace in Devonshire. The rooms are filled with English furniture of the seventeenth century, and in the rooms is housed a portion of the finest Sir Walter Raleigh Collection outside England. In contrast, to my rear are the Early Carolina Rooms, consisting of the interior of an eighteenth-century Quaker-plan house that once stood in Pasquotank County, North Carolina. In the Early Carolina Rooms are housed books from the University's first library — you know of course that this is the oldest state university in America to open its doors to students — and books owned by early North Carolinians. I should add that Paul Green is partially responsible for our having both of these suites. What you see, however, is only the tip of the iceberg, for the North Carolina Collection is a huge library that extends into the stacks on two levels. More than 150,000 volumes in all, and they have been received as gifts or purchased through endowment funds established by people who loved North Carolina. Not a cent of tax money goes to purchase materials for this Collection, but our "room and board" are furnished from the University's budget. The portraits of two of our saints hang behind me: to my right, John Sprunt Hill,

and to my left, Bruce Cotten. In the rear of the room hangs the large portrait of Stephen B. Weeks, the first "professional" historian in North Carolina, whose son and daughter-in-law have left us their great collection of rare books and prints. Mrs. Weeks died last week, and I leave next Wednesday for Alexandria to make arrangements for the transfer of the materials.

A few hundred feet from this building a mammoth new structure is going up — the $22 million Central Library. Next year the main collection of the Library will move from Wilson Library to the new building. Then, for two years, the front portion of this structure will be renovated, after which the North Carolina Collection will expand over the entire first floor plus several levels of stacks. The room in which you are sitting will become the North Caroliniana Gallery, and our main reading room will move to the west wing. In that large reading room will be a smaller room — the Thomas Wolfe Room — which will house many of Wolfe's books and memorabilia. Our architect has already visited the Old Kentucky Home and picked out some touches to be included in the new room, such as a mantel and window to match those at the Memorial. When your meeting rotates back to Chapel Hill, the Thomas Wolfe Room will be ready for you to see.

I want to explain that the Thomas Wolfe Collection was placed at Tom's alma mater under an agreement to which the Library strictly adheres. All literary rights to the manuscripts, which are kept in the vault, are retained by the Estate of Thomas Wolfe — a living, legal entity that governs the use of the literary production of Tom Wolfe. Individual access to the family papers is authorized by the administrator of the Estate of Thomas Wolfe, Paul Gitlin, the noted copyright attorney in New York. Mr. Gitlin, who has always been most cooperative with us, had planned to be here to discuss this point as only an attorney can, but he had to cancel due to his wife's illness. He has a dean's-list nephew here in the University, and he still expects to visit before long. Anyone wishing access to the unpublished materials contacts Mr. Gitlin, whose address we can supply, explaining his or her research needs. Upon approval of the request, Mr. Gitlin writes the researcher who sends or brings the letter to the Collection. Because the Collection is serviced only by professional members of our staff, a researcher should contact us in advance to make sure that the manuscripts are accessible on the date of the proposed visit. Access for reading purposes does not automatically authorize copying; researchers planning to request copies should ask Mr. Gitlin specifically for that per-

mission also. We always have on display or otherwise available a representative sampling of Wolfe materials to satisfy the interest of casual visitors.

Printed works in the Wolfe Collection are almost invariably duplicated in the main North Carolina Collection catalog, and a reader will normally use the duplicate copies. Photographs and audiovisuals are housed separately, and appointment is made in advance with our photographic librarian for access to them.

There is one person in the whole world who has handled every manuscript in the Thomas Wolfe Collection. She knows the Collection, and it is she who will describe it to you. It may be confusing to you when I tell you that Frances Weaver is really the assistant university archivist and works in the Southern Historical Collection. Her interest in Wolfe, however, leads her to share her talents with us from time to time, and I look forward to the summer when she will again serve us part-time in arranging and describing the Fred Wolfe Collection which, for a period of ten years, will be accessible only with the permission of Ed Gambrell.

The most visible expressions of Frances Weaver's interest in Wolfe are (1) the splendid archival finding aid that she has produced on the Thomas Wolfe Collection and (2) the fine exhibition on display in the lobby, in the hallway, and in this room. For those who have not yet had time to view the exhibits, I should explain that each exhibit case covers a particular experience or series of experiences during Wolfe's life, so you can start anywhere, though one might be advised to begin with the lobby case, then go to the far end of the hall and work down into the reading room.

*H. G. Jones is curator of the North Carolina Collection, of which the Thomas Wolfe Collection is a part. He is author of *For History's Sake* (1966), *The Records of a Nation* (1969), and other historical works. When he was director of the North Carolina Department of Archives and History, he arranged for the establishment of Thomas Wolfe's home in Asheville as a state historic site. His paper was given at the Saturday afternoon session.

*FRANCES A. WEAVER**

The Thomas Wolfe Collection

I'm delighted to be with you today. I don't often have a chance to share my enthusiasm for Thomas Wolfe, but when I'm with this particular group of people I know I'm with friendly folk and can be enthusiastic with impunity.

I'm going to talk to you about the Thomas Wolfe Collection of the University of North Carolina. I have tried to put items in the exhibits which illustrate not only Wolfe's life but which also express the diversity of the Collection. The exhibits are in the main lobby of the library. There is also one case here in the North Carolina Collection which is devoted to the final journey west in 1938 and to Wolfe's illness and death.

I think you probably all know what we here in North Carolina consider the "sad story" of the Wisdom Collection at Harvard. It was a very sad loss indeed when the University was unable to raise the $5,000 necessary to buy the manuscripts and letters offered for sale by the Thomas Wolfe Estate. Maxwell Perkins then sold them to William Wisdom, who later gave the entire collection to Harvard.

Wolfe's family was not very happy about that transaction. In our Thomas Wolfe Collection we have an exchange of letters among Julia Wolfe and Fred and Mabel, in which they all express their dismay that Tom's papers had gone to Harvard. Julia said that though Tom did love Harvard, he loved Carolina more, and she was sorry that his papers did not come to this University.

In the 1940s, Mabel, Fred, Effie, and Frank Wolfe decided that they would like to give the family collection of Wolfe material to the University in honor of their parents. That was accomplished in 1950 when the papers were transferred to the University. That family group of papers is the real core of the Wolfe Collection. It includes the correspondence of Thomas Wolfe with his mother and his brothers and sisters. There are al-

so correspondence between members of the family, scrapbooks, clippings, printed materials by and about Thomas Wolfe, and photographs. I'll come back to the photographs later, as they are a most important part of the Collection.

In addition to the family gift we have received a number of others. The largest addition, and a very important one, was the gift of the family of John Skally Terry.

Terry, as you all know, was working on a biography of Wolfe for fifteen years, and he collected an assortment of material. It came to us in very poor order and very poor condition. It is a spotty group of papers and far from an inclusive research tool for a biography, but there are some very interesting items in the Terry papers. Among the most interesting are Terry's interviews with Julia Wolfe. We have those on old dictaphone cylinders which are now so worn and scratchy that it is difficult to retrieve the sound. But fortunately Terry transcribed most of those interviews so we have Julia Wolfe on paper as interviewed by John Terry. If you read those interviews straight through you would think you were reading "The Web of Earth." They have the same flow of language that Wolfe used when he was writing about his mother. They are anecdotal, some of them are very funny, and they constitute a remarkable addition to the Terry group of papers. We are now engaged in trying to find a way to retrieve the sound so that we will have Julia's voice as well as Julia's transcriptions.

We have had gifts from a number of other people as well. Albert and Gladys Coates, Ben Cone, Mrs. Archibald Henderson, James Holly Hanford — (I'm sure to leave someone out) — and others gave us their letters from Wolfe. Dick Walser donated two very interesting letters from William Faulkner on the subject of Thomas Wolfe.

We have also purchased material, notably from the Julian Meade Estate. In the early 1930s Julian Meade wrote to Thomas Wolfe and inquired about his approach to writing. In essence, he asked Wolfe how he wrote, and Wolfe responded in six long letters. Those letters were printed in *Scribner's Magazine* in November 1950. We later purchased the original letters from Wolfe to Meade, and they now form part of the Thomas Wolfe Collection.

Edward Aswell gave his correspondence with the brothers and sisters of Thomas Wolfe. The Aswell Series of papers (series is an archival word used to denote a specific segment in a group of papers; in this case we used it to denote the origin of each group in the Wolfe Collection) has no original Wolfe material. It is simply the correspondence of Edward Aswell

with Mabel Wolfe Wheaton and Fred Wolfe. There is also a little correspondence with Effie Gambrell and Frank Wolfe.

This correspondence with the Wolfe family is extensive. There must be over three hundred letters from Aswell to Fred Wolfe and more than that to Mabel, as well as their responses to him. Aswell was a meticulous and careful executor, scrupulous about the details of the financial estate and a jealous guardian of the literary rights. More than that, he was a kind and loving friend to the Wolfe family. He took on the whole task as part of his obligation to Tom, and it is clear from the papers that he was diligent in the performance of his duties.

Aswell material is open to the public. It was closed until the death of Fred Wolfe, but now it is available to researchers. It does not come under the restrictions imposed on us by the Wolfe Estate. Any material that is copied and used for publication, however, must be cleared through the estates of the people involved. But, while the Aswell papers are still subject to the copyright laws, we are free to grant access.

We have another series in the Wolfe papers which is open to the public under the same guidelines as the Aswell series. That is the gift material. I have mentioned some of those items to you, and I brought a box of those papers out here to show you. Here is a letter from Thomas Wolfe to Ben Cone, written on October 27, 1929, just after the publication of *Look Homeward, Angel.* I see one here from Thomas Wolfe to Corydon Spruill. We have photocopies of Mr. Coates's correspondence from Thomas Wolfe in this box.

We have a number of other kinds of things in the Collection, the most important of which are the photographs. These are really the photograph collection of the Wolfe family. The photographs came to us largely in photograph albums, like this one, and others so large I couldn't bring them out. Jerry Cotten, the photographic archivist of the North Carolina Collection, has taken all the photographs of Thomas Wolfe, and many of those of his family, and had a film negative made from the originals. Then he made prints which he has mounted on these acid-free envelopes. The envelope is labeled and dated and has a call number. These copies are the photographs with which researchers work. The albums are far too fragile to permit handling. The envelopes, however, are available for researchers by appointment with Jerry.

It is an astonishing collection of photographs and in itself documents the life of a family in Asheville from about 1883 until about 1958, when Mabel, who had been the custodian of such family material, died. It is an

authentic American documentary and would be so if Thomas Wolfe had never written a word.

Every now and then we have a wonderful surprise. About two years ago a lady who lives in Orange County came in and said that she had been taking down an old picture that hung in her family home. She wanted to remount and reframe it. In doing so she found that the picture had this old poster for backing and she wondered if we would be interested in it.

The poster is the original one announcing the Carolina Playmakers production of "When Witches Ride," a play of Carolina folk superstition by Elizabeth Lay (now Mrs. Paul Green), and "The Return of Buck Gavin," a tragedy of mountain people, by Thomas Wolfe. We said we'd like to have it very much! We have had it cleaned, had the tape removed; and it has taken its place in the Thomas Wolfe Collection as one of our great treasures.

Not too long before Mabel Wheaton died she heard that Leila Nance Moffett, who lived in Virginia, owned some of the costumes that were used in that production of "Buck Gavin." Mrs. Wheaton bought them and gave them to us. This is the belt that Thomas Wolfe wore in the play. We have the shoes that Leila wore and some knitting she must have been required to do as part of her role. We have her dress and other ephemeral items used in "The Return of Buck Gavin."

We also have Mabel Wheaton's scrapbooks. Most of these scrapbooks contain clippings. Mabel, however, had the annoying habit (to an archivist) of occasionally pasting a letter or telegram in among the clippings. These deal mostly with Tom's illness and death. They are very moving and very important for researchers. We have many other letters and telegrams from that fateful summer, but these in this scrapbook fill in the gaps and provide more information about the events in Seattle and Baltimore. The scrapbooks are very fragile and difficult to handle. Consequently we have had them filmed, and researchers use the film rather than the actual scrapbooks. We did, however, have copyflo copies of the letters and telegrams made and they have been interfiled chronologically with the correspondence.

There is one interesting item which Mabel pasted into one of the scrapbooks. This is a program from the Olympics of 1936. Those of you who have worked with Wolfe manuscripts know that Wolfe wrote on everything. At the top of this program is a little bit of genuine Wolfe material. It is related to the Olympics and says, "Two weeks, two weeks of games. . . ," and then it becomes difficult to read. It is taped into the

scrapbook and we have been unable to remove the tape without tearing the paper and pulling off the writing, so we don't know whether or not there is any writing on the back.

We also have recordings in the Thomas Wolfe Collection — cassettes, reel-to-reel tapes, and 33 RPM discs. They are artistic recordings for the most part — such items as "A Spoken Anthology of American Literature," with a segment from *Look Homeward, Angel.* But we also have a number of recorded interviews with members of the Wolfe family. Those are available to researchers upon request and with the permission of the curator or assistant curator of the North Carolina Collection.

I haven't mentioned the clippings. We maintain a clipping file of anything related to Thomas Wolfe. And I haven't mentioned the printed material. We make a valiant effort to acquire all printed material by and about Thomas Wolfe. We order two copies. One is shelved in those cages along the wall of this room which houses the Wolfe Collection, and the other is placed in the stacks and is available in this room to general readers.

And there is more in this constantly growing and ever-changing collection. Though we were unable to purchase the wonderful collection that went to Harvard, we have a truly unique and significant collection here. Because of the autobiographical nature of Wolfe's work, the family material is extremely important; and we at the University are honored that the Wolfe family chose to place it in Wolfe's first and much-loved alma mater.

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MEMORIES OF THOMAS WOLFE

Except for the impromptu remarks made by William H. Bobbitt at the Saturday morning session and the paper of Moses Rountree who could not attend, the reminiscences in the following pages were given at a special Saturday afternoon session presided over by Bobbie E. Purser, secretary of the Society. All but those of Albert and Gladys Coates, Ralph D. Williams, and Vance E. Swift are edited transcriptions from tape.

Pictured below are all of the schoolmates present for the meeting except former Chief Justice Bobbitt, who had to leave at noon. They are, left to right: Paul Green, Albert Coates, Corydon P. Spruill, Phillip Hettleman, Elizabeth Lay Green, Ralph D. Williams, R. H. Souther, William H. Andrews, Nathan Mobley, Vance E. Swift, Benjamin Cone, and Katherine Robinson Everett. (Photograph by H. G. Jones.)

WILLIAM H. BOBBITT, '21

I didn't know Tom Wolfe after he left the University. But this Dialectic Society was a matter of major interest to me, and I remember a few things that might be of interest.

I was not here when Tom made his famous introductory freshman speech; I came in one year later. My association with him was to a large extent here in the Dialectic Society during my freshman year and his sophomore year. Afterward he became more interested in other things — including Dr. Greenlaw's English class, the Playmakers, the *Tar Heel*, and various literary pursuits — with which I had no particular connection. But I do remember a couple of instances in the Dialectic Society Hall when he was imbued with the fascination of Elizabethan speech. He liked to paraphrase some of it, and one of his paraphrased reminiscences went something like this: "My lord, a lady awaits without." "Without what?" "Without food and clothing." "Feed her and show her in."

I remember another instance when a friend of ours was making a talk to the Society. He had an unfortunate habit of spitting, but not really spitting anything — just going through the motion, a nervous habit altogether. Finally Tom couldn't stand it any longer. He gained recognition and said, "Mr. Chairman, we came here tonight expecting an oration, but instead we are having an expectoration."

I might remark upon Tom's genius. He and I were in the same logic class under Dr. Horace Williams. Tom was a little careless in his dress and his attendance and took very few notes, if any. When it came time for examination, however, he got excited. I had taken care to make some notes as we went along in the class, and I had a reasonably legible set of notes. Tom borrowed that set of notes and read all night, and the next morning we took the examination. He made an "A" on the course and I made a "B." He handled words better than I did! And I think Horace — as he usually did — had already picked Wolfe to be the genius that he later became, acknowledged by all.

Tom had a rather unusual sense of humor. He liked stories involving George Bernard Shaw. For instance, one night Shaw appeared on the stage of a theatre and was given a tumultuous ovation. Tumultuous, that is, except for one fellow in the balcony who, when things reasonably subsided, called out, "Aw, Pshaw." Whereupon Shaw responded, "I agree with you, my friend, but what are so few against so many?" Finally, this is not an elegant tale, but we'll survive. Tom told of Shaw's sitting in the theatre, studying his program. A fellow in the row behind kept sticking his head over Shaw's shoulder to read his program. Finally, Shaw just pulled out his handkerchief, reached around, and wiped the fellow's nose. "Pardon me, my friend, I thought it was my own," he said.

PAUL GREEN, '21

You know, I hardly know how to get started here. Tom and I entered here in 1916. He was 6'10" tall and weighed 110 pounds. We took Latin and English together, and Tom had a wonderful way. He was dramatic by instinct: he would always come into class a little bit late, make quite a stir, and go to the rear of the room. The other boys would stick their feet out and try to trip him up.

I knew Tom pretty well, but I was much older. I had been teaching school and pitching baseball to make some money so I could come to the University, so I was twenty and he was approaching sixteen. So we were quite different in age, but I guess elderly and youth took to each other, and I got to know Tom very well. Then, during the war I got fired up to help save the country and the world for democracy, so I went away to war; and when I came back Tom was king of the campus. He was the boss man around here, and from 110 pounds he had gained weight as he grew greater in intellectual power.

Tom was interested in writing very early, and we used to talk about writing; and when I came back from the war he was the head man of

Sigma Upsilon writing club. He asked me if I would like to join, and I said yes. Then he said, "We'll vote on you and maybe nobody will blackball you." Well, they voted and I received a letter from Tom inscribed: "O thou penitent and bowed-down neophyte, you have from the great cyclops at the top the following message: 'Thou wilt get a package of Zoo-Zoo crackers, go to the post office at 7:00, kneel down and pray for one-half hour; then thou wilt leave and go to the Methodist Church and extend thy form on a hard bench and spend the night in solitude and meditation.' " Well, the next day I met Tom at class and he asked, "Where were you last night?" I said, "Hell, I've been in the war; do you think I would follow this sort of stuff?" "Well," he said. "I don't think we can pass you." I replied, "That's all right with me, Tom." Later I had a message from him: "O thou rebellious one, we have decided to take thee in." I'm telling this because there's another side of Tom — human enough. He told me that we would be initiated in the old graveyard the following night at 7:00. So I went to the graveyard, and there were all these Ku Klux Klan characters with hoods with big eyes cut out. The tallest — in fact, each one — had a hidden club. They read my name and took me into the great order. A writing group indulging in this! They made me kneel, and the next thing I knew somebody hit me back here with a board and let out a high hyena laugh. I looked up and it was Tom in his costume. He beat the hell out of me. I had never been so beaten, and I grew full of hate for Tom Wolfe at that moment. Well, you would have too! So next day I told Tom, "I hate your guts!" He just laughed and said, "Wonderful, wonderful!" Nevertheless, after that we got to be very good friends. I saw him many times in New York and elsewhere and admired his greatness, but I still remember that hyena laugh of triumph as he subjected this pitiful character to corporal punishment. Well, he was human, all right.

The last time I saw Tom alive was here in Chapel Hill when he came out to the house and talked, talked, talked. What if we'd had a tape recorder then! I guess about 9:30 I had to take him to Raleigh, and riding along — the rain was pouring — I said, "Tom, what are you going to do next?" He replied that he was going out to the northwest. I asked if he had thought of just going the "whole hog" and writing the epic of America in a poetic extravaganza — let it roll, don't worry about characterization or plot, but a hymn to America. He said, "Well, that's maybe something to think about."

We went over to see Jonathan Daniels and had a party, Tom talking all the time. We had a bottle of liquor, and I guess they drank about half of it when Tom made a wonderful proposition: "Jonathan, there's so much liquor left, why don't you save it and we'll make a pledge among the three of us that when one of us dies, the survivors will drink a toast to the deceased." Jonathan said "Good." Well, Tom went away, and the next we heard was of his death. Jonathan, Professor Koch, Elizabeth, and I drove up to Asheville, and on the way Professor Koch said, "We've got to have some violets for Tom's funeral out of *Buck Gavin.*" In Asheville he searched everywhere and called everybody. He wouldn't give up, and late in the afternoon he found a bunch of violets for Tom's funeral. So Elizabeth, Jonathan, Professor Koch, and I went around to the house, and there we looked at Tom. It was just the way he would have described it. Mrs. Wolfe would say, "You see here where they cut him," and Mabel would say, "No, Mama, that's not the way it was." We had quite an experience, and the next day the funeral was a moving experience, also. It was a trying moment — well, more than a moment — when the minister tried to work Tom into heaven. He had a tough time. Then we started carrying Tom to the cemetery. Either Albert Coates or Phillips Russell or somebody wasn't lifting his part, because it almost broke my back. So in Riverside Cemetery we put Tom away.

What makes greatness, how does it grow? He became such a sensitive Aeolian heart that the winds of life blew across and made this celestial beauty, music that we listen to. Jonathan Daniels was so moved that he wrote a piece about Tom for the *Saturday Review*, and since Jonathan is not here I'd like to read just a few words from it:

> I saw Tom last just a little more than a month later. He lay against the crinkly undertaker's satin in the oversized coffin they had had to build for him. After his operation a wig-maker had had to make a wig for him to be dead in. He lay in his mother's Dixieland tourist home in a room with long cracks in the yellow plaster ceiling above him. That was the house, as Tom had written of it, in which an evangelist had turned to drink, one boarder had hanged himself, a turbercular had stained the floor in hemorrhage, an old man had cut his throat. It was the house in which his youth, he said, had been crowded about with a diverse company of boarding women and men, girls with "nigger-drawling desire from South Carolina," a secretly coughing tubercular Jew, Negresses quartered in the dank, windowless rooms in the basement. And that day Tom's mother stood at the head of the coffin, tearless and strong, talking calmly and apparently unshaken.

We need to look not backward to Tom but forward with him. He spoke for us now, when he wrote not long before he died,

> I think the true discovery of America is before us.
>
> I think the true fulfillment of our spirit, of our people, of our mighty and immortal land, is yet to come.
>
> I think I speak for most men living when I say that our America is *here*, is *now*, and beckons on before us and that the great assurance is not our living hope, but our dream yet to be accomplished.

So in those words we take off our hat to Thomas Wolfe not only for his lyric voice but for his soaring philosophy of hope, endeavor, and ultimate accomplishment, or else we perish.

ELIZABETH GREEN, '19

I have been so impressed with all that I've heard that the few little remarks that I am going to make about women in the early days at the University here seem rather mediocre. When I came here there were fifteen girls in the student body in the first year, and the second year there were only twenty-five. Some of the boys sided with us women and tried to give us a little push. One of the things that Tom did was to place me on the board of the *Tar Heel*, of which he was editor. Every week we met upstairs in the old Gerrard Hall. In those days it was not considered proper for a girl to be on the campus at night by herself, so Tom — I don't know how he worked it — appointed certain members of the board who were to escort me to and from the meetings. I remember Dougald MacMillan was one of them. He was very serious and later was a noted professor for so many years. But as he walked with me across the campus, he remarked to me one night, "Don't you get any ideas from this now." Actually, I really didn't have much to do, for the *Tar Heel* was mainly concerned with athletics; and I didn't have much news to contribute from the fifteen

girls. So I didn't really work much, but nobody else on the board did either except Tom. He would wait until the last minute, and then he would gather all his notes and take them over to the Seeman Printery in Durham; and there he would construct the current issue of the *Tar Heel*, which came out just once a week in those days. That was one of the first things the women started doing; I think ever since then we have had women on the *Tar Heel*.

Tom was a personal friend of our family. My brother roomed with Tom and, I'm sorry to say, he didn't come out very well in Tom's writing of him; nobody did, really. I think Horace Williams was the only person whose portrait really bloomed under Tom's ministration. Everybody was presented satirically and my brother came out very poorly; but it was an amusing portrait. Tom had the skill to bring people to life. My father was rector of St. Mary's School in Raleigh, and Tom would come over with my brother; and I think he spent the night in the rectory sometimes. Also, I have a distinct impression that he went to the school dining room with all these girls. He didn't seem to be bothered by it at all. He took everything in his stride; he was on top of most everything. I had classes with Tom, and I thought of him as most everybody on campus did — as a distinguished figure and a very amusing one. Everybody knew him; he was very tall, and he had a peculiar gait when he walked across the campus. You knew that was Tom Wolfe!

We heard he was going to Harvard. We didn't know how Harvard was going to react, but we thought he'd live through it. We'd hoped he would write a play, but he never wrote one that could be produced here at the university; and he didn't succeed in playwriting when he went to New York either. A play was what he wanted to write, but of course what he did write was so much more wonderful than a play could have been.

I didn't see him for years and years after that. My husband would see him in New York, but I was busy raising a family and I didn't see Tom until he came back years later. He had written *You Can't Go Home Again*, but he did come home; he came back to Asheville, and he rented a little place there. I think he stayed there one summer, and he came to Chapel Hill and renewed some of his old relationships. He had changed in a great many ways. He was a real person then, just the same height; but he weighed a good deal more, and he was very impressive to anybody who met him. I think that's about all I've got to say about Tom, unless anybody has a question about him. [Paul Green asked Mrs. Green if she re-

membered Wolfe's stuttering.] I don't remember his stuttering. [Mr. Green commented, "He stuttered very badly as a freshman, but he got over that."] I didn't know him until he was a junior, I think. But he seemed always to know what he was going to say and just how he was going to say it. He was a very interesting person to be with, but he didn't waste much time on us women.

ALBERT COATES, '18

I shall use the time allotted to me by relating several recollections from my association with Tom Wolfe and telling you of the impression he made on me.

-1-

There was the night before the Carolina-VMI football game in Chapel Hill, while he was editor-in-chief on the *Tar Heel*. He came to my room with this complaint:

> Albert, we have had a sorry team this year, the students have had no enthusiasm for it, and now at the end of the season they are becoming ashamed of themselves, and putting the blame on me and the *Tar Heel* for lack of whipping up the Carolina spirit and supporting the team. I am going out to cover the game tomorrow myself and write the news story, and see that the *Tar Heel* supports the team.

VMI beat Carolina 29 to nothing and Jimmy Leach on the VMI team was the hero of the day. Tom's description of the game was a burst of journalistic satire written in this vein: "Leach ran around Carolina's right end for forty-five yards, only to be downed in his tracks." You will find it in the *Tar Heel* on the day after the game in the fall of 1919. Here it is:

First, Mr. Leach, who attends school at VMI would grab the ball and race 40 yards up the field where Carolina's impregnable defense would stiffen and throw him for a loss. Then, Mr. Leach would go around Carolina's right end for 15 yards only to be downed in his tracks. Before defense such as this VMI was helpless and was held to a niggardly 29 points.

The game was replete with thrilling plays and first class football. Trouble was VMI held a monopoly.

The fast . . . and powerful Carolina backfield ripped through the VMI line and tore around the ends with the speed of the agile steam tractor as it leaps nimbly over the hillside.

The game was friendly fought and the size of score was at all times in doubt.

The *Tar Heel* had supported the team at last!

-2-

There was the afternoon in Cambridge in the spring of 1921, while Tom was in Professor Baker's Playwriting 47 course at Harvard, writing plays that would run four to five hours, and friendly critics were urging him to cut them down to a shorter length. Tom resented this criticism, and in a long walk together along the banks of Charles River, he said to me with articulate fervor and rising passion: "Albert, cutting out a sentence would be like cutting off a finger. Cutting out a scene would be like cutting off an arm. Cutting it to two hours in length would be cutting the heart out of it." He told me of his dreams of himself "sitting in the balcony of some great theatre while my plays are being performed — my words are being spoken by the actors, my scenes living in action, and me thrilling to the applause of the audience after audience, night after night." His imagination was so vivid that I was satisfied he got almost as much out of the anticipation as he would have got out of the reality. And so did I!

-3-

There was the incident involving Colonel Pendergraft who ran a bus service from Chapel Hill to Durham during my college days in Chapel Hill. He was a colorful character and a great friend. One day, in the middle 1920s, he stopped me in front of his bus stand on the street and told me a trouble on his mind: "Albert, the doctor tells me I have got a row of cancers up and down my chest, and he gives me six months to live. But I don't feel anything — look at this," and he struck his chest vigorous

blows with his fist, saying "It don't hurt a bit." He led me over to a tree on the sidewalk which had been badly scarred, with healthy growth now covering the scar. "That tree has got a new lease on life and has got a long time to live. Why can't I live on like that tree?"

I told Tom this story. Years later he told me that he had used it in his latest novel. I found that his imagination had transformed this incident into something uniquely his own, put it in Eliza's mouth in the family conversation going on around his father's deathbed, and transformed it into pages of magic prose without a word of padding. You will find it on pages 239-241 in *Of Time and The River:*

> ". . . I got to studyin' it over tonight and it's just occurred to me — now I'll tell you what *my* theory is! I believe that that old growth — that awful old thing — that — well, I suppose, now, you might say — that *cancer,*" she said, making a gesture of explanation with her broad hand — "whatever it is, that awful old thing that has been eating away inside him there for years —" here she pursed her lips powerfully and shook her head in a short convulsive tremor of disgust — "well, now, I give it as my theory that the whole thing tore loose in him yesterday — when he had that attack — and," she paused deliberately, looked her daughter straight in the eyes, and went on with a slow and telling force — "and that he has simply gone and got that rotten old thing out of his system."
>
> . . . . . .
>
> "Now, child —" Eliza pursued her subject deliberately, with a ruminant relish of her strong pursed lips — "I was born and brought up in the country — close to the lap of Mother Earth, as the sayin' goes — and when it comes to *trees* — why, I reckon there's mighty little about 'em that I don't know. . . . Now here," she said abruptly, coming to the centre of her argument — "did you ever see a tree that had a big hollow gash down one side — that looked like it had all been eaten an' rotted out by some disease that had been destroyin' it?"
>
> "Why, yes," Helen said, in a puzzled voice. "But I don't see yet —"
>
> "Well, child, I'll tell you, then," said Eliza, both voice and worn brown eyes united in their portents of a grave and quiet earnestness — "that tree doesn't *always* die! You'll see trees that have had that happen to them — and they *cure* themselves! You can see where . . . the tree has got the best of it — and grown up again — as sound and healthy as it ever was — around that old rotten growth. And that," she said triumphantly, "that is just exactly what has happened to that maple in the yard. Oh, you can *see* it!" she cried positively, at the same time making an easy descriptive gesture with her wide hand — "you can see where it has lapped right around that old growth — made a sort of fold, you know — and here it is just as sound and healthy as it ever was!"

"Then you mean? —"

"I mean," said Eliza in her straight and deadly fashion — "I mean that if a tree can do it, a *man* can do it — and I mean that if any man alive could do it your daddy is that man — for he's had as much strength and vitality as any man I ever saw — and *more* than a tree!" she cried. "Lord! I've seen him do enough to kill a *hundred* trees — the things *he's* done and managed to get over would kill the strongest tree that ever lived!"

-4-

There was the evening in the early 1930s — shortly after *Look Homeward, Angel* had come off the press — when George Wright, a noted property lawyer in Asheville, came to Chapel Hill to talk to my Law School class on land titles and spent the night in my home. While talking after dinner, I asked him if he knew the Wolfe family. "Yes," he said,

> I know them all, and I know Mrs. Wolfe particularly well. I was her lawyer for nineteen years and handled all her real estate transactions. Tom didn't make up things about her in his book. He described her as she was and she knew it and took it as the truth he meant it to be and she was fascinated with his description. She was at the ironing board when the first copy of *Look Homeward, Angel* was brought to her; she put down the iron and started going through the book, and five hours later when she came back to finish her work she found that the hot iron had burned through the ironing board.

Mr. Wright added this story about Tom's book:

> I am the attorney for a firm of real estate men in Asheville. Not long after *Look Homeward, Angel* was published, I took some land title abstracts to their office at mid-morning on a brisk day. The door was locked, I looked at my watch. It was not a holiday, and these men were the sort of men who would not be taking a day off from business. I kept on knocking. Soon I heard someone tiptoeing to the door. "Oh, it's you. Come on in." He took me to the inner office where four partners in the real estate firm were sitting around a table, reading passages from Tom's book, and writing down in the margin the names of the persons described. These down-to-earth business traders were marvelling at the fact that they had been acquainted all their lives with the men Tom had described and had not really known what made them tick until they read Tom's descriptions.

It was the businessman's tribute to the poetic insight which cut deeper than their own personal observation.

There was the day in the late 1960s when Andrew Turnbull came to Chapel Hill to gather information for his biography on Thomas Wolfe. Part of his conversation within footnote 15 of his book:

> Was he on the threshold of an artistic breakthrough when he died? Had he been allowed his three score years and ten, would he have cut a substantially greater figure?
>
> I am inclined to say "No." . . . Wolfe died young, it is true — three weeks before his thirty-eighth birthday — but there had been time to show what he had. At this age, Faulkner, Hemingway, and Fitzgerald had done most of the work on which their reputation rests.
>
> Viewed with the hindsight of three decades, Wolfe's life completes a circle, returns on itself. He had uttered his cry, which was also the cry of a continent. . . .
>
> Wolfe's life ends with the enormous question, "What if he had lived?"

I differ with this appraisal. I think that Tom had just begun to write, and let me tell you why.

In the year before he died he wrote a friend:

> Your own idea, evidently, is that life is unchangeable, that the abuses I protest against — the greed, the waste, the poverty, the filth, the suffering — are inherent in humanity, and that any other system than the one we have would be just as bad as this one. In this I find myself in profound and passionate conflict. . . .
>
> As I have grown older, as I have seen life in manifold phases all over the earth, I have become more passionately convinced than ever before . . . that this system of living must be changed, that men must have a new faith, a new heroism, a new belief, if life is to be made better, is the heart and core of my own faith and my own conviction, the end toward which I believe I must henceforth direct every energy of my life and talent. . . .
>
> I have at last discovered my own America. I believe I have found my language, I think I know my way. And I shall work out my vision of this life, this way, this world and this America, to the top of my bent, to the height of my ability, but with an unswerving devotion, integrity and purity of purpose that shall not be menaced, altered, or weakened by anyone.
>
> I am afraid of nothing now. I have nothing more to lose except my life and health. And that I pray and hope to God will stay with me till my work is done. That, it seems to me, is the only tragedy that can now stay with me.

But life and health did not stay with him till his work was done.

On a day in September, 1938, I got a telegram from Tom's sister, Mabel, asking me to be a pallbearer at Tom's funeral. I wept.

My wife and I drove to Asheville the evening before. Next morning we went around to the Old Kentucky Home and saw Tom in the flesh for the last time. As I looked at him, I thought to myself:

Tom has been too tall for the ordinary rooms he had entered, too heavy for ordinary chairs he had sat in, too big for the ordinary suits of clothes he had worn, and it was only natural that a coffin for him could not be found in stock and had to be made to order and that eight pallbearers instead of the usual six had carried him to his grave. He was out of this world, and in it. He lived and died at the mercy of his own genius.

Tom Wolfe was the most vivid man that I have ever known in flesh and blood. He had the most far-reaching imagination of any man I have ever known. He had a mind of the most penetrating quality and rock-crushing power of any man I have ever known. He was the most articulate and expressive man I have ever known. He could beguile me into believing I had witnessed scenes he described — as in his description of his giant father throwing a can of kerosene on an already roaring fire in a great fireplace. I had been a guest of Tom's home for a week and got in the habit of telling my friends that I saw him do it — until my wife gently observed: "I thought you were there in August." And so it was! He was all there, all at once, and all the time.

He gave up half a dozen possible careers to achieve one. What if he had followed his father's ambition for him to become a lawyer and go into politics? He showed fully as much aptitude for politics and public life in his college days as he showed for writing. What an orator he would have made! What an advocate he would have made — at the bar, in political campaigns, in public forums anywhere! And what a writer the world would have lost!

A year or two ago Pamela Hansford Johnson, on a visit to Chapel Hill, wondered why Tom had given himself so grotesque a description as the person of Monk Webber, when "he looked more like the figure of Adam in Michelangelo's *Creation* where God was touching his finger." That God had touched Tom's finger I had no doubt.

GLADYS HALL COATES

[Mrs. Coates was not a schoolmate of Wolfe's but she came to know him well through her husband and through their visits.]

Some wit observed at the time man was launched into space that the only persons really prepared for such a momentous event were the children acquainted with the feats of Superman. That was my state of mind when Thomas Wolfe's first novel, *Look Homeward, Angel,* was published and became a success. I was prepared for that event, for I had often heard of Thomas Wolfe from a friend in my hometown of Portsmouth, Virginia, who had known Tom at Harvard and spoke of him in glowing terms.

Then I met Albert Coates who had known Tom at Chapel Hill and for a time had shared an apartment with him while attending Harvard Law School. Albert had much to say about Thomas Wolfe and what a remarkable person he was.

Shortly after, while visiting in Warrenton, North Carolina, I met William Polk, who was then practicing law there and later became an editor of the *Greensboro Daily News.* He, too, had been with Thomas Wolfe at Harvard, shared an apartment, and spoke warmly of him.

In a year or so, Albert and I were married, and when we had settled in our new home he turned over to me his old army trunk containing numerous bachelor effects and mementoes, and suggested that I look them over to see what should be kept and what discarded — an amazing vote of confidence at which I have never ceased to marvel! In the course of sorting out the contents of the trunk I came upon several letters from Thomas Wolfe — not in a carefully tied-up package but scattered throughout in flotsam, jetsam fashion. I did not need to be told that these letters must be saved, for like the children and Superman I was certain they were written by a genius! I carefully separated them from the rest of the material and have happily preserved them to this day.

They are delightful letters, written by a young man to a good friend — extravagant in praise of his friend's high grade in a law course and generous in prophecy of his future in the law, laughter at the antics of other friends, longing for recognition in the plays he was writing and struggling so hard to have produced, and nostalgic in their references to North Carolina and Chapel Hill. There are passages in one letter as lyrical as any in his novels:

> I am twenty-three years old, and the Spring comes north already; soon tar will be spongy on the streets, and the promise of adventure is abroad. There are girls about — girls with rose-lipped mouths, and a seductive rhythm in their walk. Some night soon, when there are stars, I shall slip like Lippo Lippi from my cloister and go forth in quest of these silver voices! I'm young, I'm young, — and at least a bit of a poet.

And there was prophecy about himself:

> And really, Albert, there are signs and tokens of a growing power within me. Don't laugh — I know *you* won't — and *don't* repeat this, but a conviction is upon me that I shall one day do a great and secret thing — only when I do it, it shall no longer be a secret thing.

I did not meet Thomas Wolfe until several years after these events. *Look Homeward, Angel* had been published and *Of Time and the River* was about to be. We were in New York and Albert got in touch with Tom through the Harvard Club, which seems to have been his medium of exchange; and he invited us to meet him at the Chatham Bar one afternoon. Maxwell Perkins came with him and we must have sat for two or more hours talking. We were certainly entertaining angels unaware, for neither of us then knew who Maxwell Perkins was. Tom brought us a copy of *Of Time and the River* and it was not until we read the great dedication he had written to his friend and editor that we learned what Maxwell Perkins had meant to him.

I recall that Tom was concerned about the sort of publicity he was getting. He was particularly unhappy at the report that he did much of his writing with the top of his refrigerator as a desk. Mr. Perkins did what he could to persuade him that such publicity though distasteful was actually not harmful to his forthcoming book. There was a lively discussion during the afternoon as to what was the best thing to do when one has completed a book. The answer to this question that I remember was: "Begin another immediately!"

Later in the evening I left to attend a performance of Katharine Cornell in *Romeo and Juliet*, while Albert and Tom had dinner together. Afterward we picked up our bags at our hotel and went to catch the train for home. Tom came with us to the station and I remember that he was intrigued by a new electric gadget that opened a station door when we walked by its beam of light. He asked me if I was able to sleep on the train and whether I was comfortable in a berth. Then I realized his great height and the difficulty he must have experienced in travelling.

It was not long after our trip to New York that we were in Asheville for a meeting, and I went around one afternoon to call on Mrs. Wolfe. It was during this visit that she said an unforgettable thing about her relation with Tom. That morning her daughter, Mabel, had called on the telephone, much disturbed about Tom's use of his family in a story that had just been published. Mrs. Wolfe said calmly that she was no longer worried about such things. "If what Tom has written about me is not true," she said, "my friends will know it is not true. And if it *is* true, why it is true." And then she added this wonderful sentence: "I am willing for Tom to use me in any way he wants in his work."

Thomas Wolfe came back to Chapel Hill the year before he died, and I believe he loved every minute of his return to his alma mater, for he was warmly received and honored. In the meantime, I had read those passages in *Of Time and the River* in which he described in great detail the delicious food and drink he had enjoyed; and I wondered if I could prepare a meal for such a sophisticated traveller. At length, I decided that I could at least cook a breakfast that might please his taste. Sunday morning was a favorite time for us to entertain, and so we invited him for a Sunday morning breakfast. We invited along with Tom his hosts, Corydon and Julia Spruill. Billy Polk and his wife, Marion, came from Warrenton. We sat down to breakfast about ten o'clock and did not leave the table until nearly four in the afternoon when all of us left for a tea party that Dean and Mrs. Dudley Carroll were giving in honor of Tom.

Tom had been wined and dined so much that he ate rather sparingly. There was nothing gargantuan about his appetite, as I had been led to believe. He was full of talk, however, about a novel he was going to write some day on his dealings with lawyers, for he felt he had suffered at their hands in the suits that had been brought against him in New York. I can still see him towering above me as he ticked off some ridiculous names of imaginary law firms that he planned to use in his novel.

The day did not end with the faculty tea party, for while we were sitting at home in the early evening a quick step on the porch announced Tom. As soon as he came in he asked, "Albert, have you got anything to drink in the house? I've been giving the Old Well a work-out!" Tom's good friends and hosts were teetotalers, and we drank very little ourselves, but I managed to forage in our larder and come up with something to quench his thirst.

Then he asked what the night life was in Chapel Hill. We told him there were no night clubs but that recently the one movie house in town

had been allowed to show Sunday night movies if the proceeds were given to charity.

"Let's go," said Tom, and we sallied forth on foot and got there just in time for the second showing of a movie called *Wild Bill Hickok*. We had to take seats very near the front because the little theatre was already jam-packed. Tom's *sotto voce* comments on the movie fascinated surrounding spectators, and soon they were listening more to him than they were looking at the picture. And so the day ended.

Billy Polk had invited Tom to visit him in Warrenton before he left North Carolina, and it was arranged that I should pick him up in Raleigh and bring him to Warrenton in our car. Albert was tied up with classes early in the day but caught a bus later to join us for dinner and an overnight stay. On the morning of the day agreed upon I drove to Raleigh, parked the car, entered the Carolina Hotel where Tom was staying, and called him on the telephone. A sleepy, muffled voice answered, and then I remembered that he was to have had a visit with Jonathan Daniels and some other friends the night before. It turned out that they had been up until all hours, having a glorious time talking and drinking, and Tom must have had very little sleep. I waited in the lobby for about an hour until he finally appeared; but not by himself, for he brought with him the most enormous object I have ever seen in the form of a travelling bag. I'm sure this huge case held many of his manuscripts.

After he had eaten breakfast — still nothing gargantuan about his appetite — we set out for Warrenton, and I have never forgotten that ride, for it was filled with Tom's exultation at the rolling country through which we passed. The whole drive was a fond celebration of the red clay and green pines of eastern North Carolina.

The visit in Warrenton was our last glimpse of Tom until we journeyed to Asheville for his funeral. When we got to his mother's house, Tom's "Dixieland," she and his brother Fred took us in to see him lying in his coffin. Tom was beautiful in death. I vividly recall his black, black hair against his marble-white face with its finely chiselled features, and the folded hands that had written so many thousands of words. I remembered one of his stories, *Death the Proud Brother*, and its magnificent apostrophe to Death, Loneliness, and Sleep, with the haunting, lovely line —

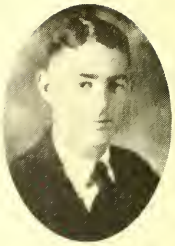
> Proud Death, wherever we have seen your face, you came with mercy, love, and pity. . . .

It was not until I was in church for the funeral service and alone in the crowd — Albert had left to serve as one of the pallbearers — that the tragedy of Tom's death began to dawn on me, and I could not hold back the tears.

> For Lycidas [was] dead, dead ere his prime.
> Young Lycidas, and [had] not left his peer.

PHILLIP HETTLEMAN, '21

I'm delighted that Mrs. Green confirmed what I said this morning about Tom's going over to the Seeman Printery in Durham, always late, always getting the copy together late and — much to the discomfort of Nat Gooding — throwing out ads to make space for his last-minute articles. I learned a lesson, and the next year, when I became business manager of the *Tar Heel*, I told Jonathan Daniels, the managing editor, "We've got to have a real paper. The athletic association was losing a great deal of money on the *Tar Heel*, and I have guaranteed them no loss this year. In fact, I want to make some money out of this thing. To do that we must print the newspaper on time." Daniels and Dan Grant agreed, and we found a company in Burlington that printed the paper cheaper and faster. After that, the *Tar Heel* always came out on Saturday — quite a change from the previous year when it was usually Sunday before Tom got the paper on the campus.



NATHAN MOBLEY, '20

Having been a very close associate of Tom's, you might think I'm going to be as voluminous in my talk as he was in his writings. But don't let me frighten you; I have just a few little things I picked up before leaving home which might be of interest. Most of them are supporting documents to what has been said so abundantly and so well today.

This morning reference was made to Tom's room here in college — how very unkempt it looked. Here is a copy of a letter I wrote to my wife on April 10, 1937:

> Last night I had a delightful evening with Tom Wolfe. I went over to his apartment about five o'clock, and that in itself is quite a sight. Outside his door were two baby carriages. He says he gets blamed for them but gets no credit for them. Inside the apartment, which has a beautiful view overlooking the East River, a glimpse around would indicate that robbers had just cleaned it out completely, or else the furniture had been replevined by the dealer. It was the barest-looking place I have ever seen. He did manage to get two chairs together for us to sit on. But it was only a few minutes when all thought of furniture was forgotten, because he is without question a most fascinating talker. We went to dinner later. Wherever we went everyone knew Mr. Wolfe — taxi drivers, newsboys and everyone. We ran into his publisher, Maxwell Perkins, at dinner, and it seemed only a few mintues before time to catch an eleven o'clock train home, after this lovely evening with Tom.

Probably one of my claims to fame, if I have any, is to have been one of Tom's first — if not *the* first — biographers. I was his biographer in the *Yackety Yack* here at Chapel Hill. It has been republished a great many times, but the author isn't usually identified. I am the biographer, and this is what I wrote about Tom:

> Editing the *Tar Heel*, winning Horace's philosophy prize when only a Junior, writing plays and then showing the world how they should be acted — they are all alike to this young Shakespeare. Last year he played the leading role in the "Midnight Frolic" at "Gooch's Winter Palace."

Gooch's was the one little restaurant in town that stayed open very late, if not all night, and Tom could very frequently be seen there, and that's how I brought in the reference to "Gooch's Winter Palace." In writing a sketch like this, at that time at least, I was writing to my fellows. I thought they would understand what I was writing about; little did I think that later it would be part of the record. So some of this is purely local. My sketch continued:

> This year Tom has played a leading role on the Carolina Shipping Board [which was the student council, whose function it was to expel students who had violated the rules]. But seriously speaking, "Buck" is a great big fellow. He can do more between 8:25 and 8:30 than the rest of us can do all day, and it is no wonder that he is classed as a genius.

So the biographer has seen his prognostication of Tom as a genius come true. That's one way of throwing some roses at the biographer!

In *Look Homeward, Angel*, I'm Nick Madley. Tom and I took Horace William's philosophy class, and Horace, as you know, was a great Hegelian. I would call him Hegel and he'd call me Spinoza and I'd call him Kant, and this lovely banter went on all the time. But when he wrote his book he was the misunderstood person. A fellow student had been overheard to say, "Professor, we call him Hegel." He made it appear that he was misunderstood.

Another instance about which I take a great deal of pride was this: Tom called me one day in 1937 — probably about two weeks after the date of this letter that I read to you — and said, "Nat, I'm drawing a will. I don't have anything to have a will for but under the New York law I must have an executor and an alternate executor. Maxwell Perkins, my publisher, is the executor, and would you be willing to be my alternate executor?" I said "Sure." I thought Tom would live forever, and to my great amazement he died in 1938. Maxwell Perkins then became the executor, and a very few years later Maxwell Perkins died. So I, who had so glibly said yes, was then the executor. The attorneys for the estate said that if I did not wish to serve — the lawyers were handling the estate very well — and if I wished to renounce the appointment, I could do so. Well, I thought very fast; I didn't even hang up the receiver. As long as I felt no moral obligation to Tom to carry out my expressed willingness to him — I had no moral obligation to him and to his family — I would decline, because I had a career to make, not basking in the career of Tom. So I renounced the appointment over the phone. Subsequent events have led me

to believe that I made a wise decision, because I don't think anyone could handle that estate with all the demands on the executor without spending a great deal of time. But Tom in writing to his mother in 1937 gave me a character reference, which isn't bad. I might have to use it sometime. He wrote,

> You remember about making the will. I'm afraid in regards to this will I'm a little bit in a position of the man who said, "If we had some ham we would have some ham and eggs if we had some eggs." If anything happened to me right now, I don't know how much anyone would be able to realize out of my so-called estate. But of course, with a writer there's always the chance that the continued sale of his books or manuscripts or other royalties may amount to something after his death. At any rate, I put the whole thing in the hands of two of the ablest and very best people I know, Mr. Perkins, who is the first executor, and Nat Mobley, who was a classmate of mine at college and who is now a vice-president of an insurance company in New York.

That's not a bad reference, so I have many happy memories of Tom, and with what I've said, I think that's enough for the moment.

BENJAMIN CONE, '20

My friends, this story that I'm about to relate, I think, has been told before. It's the famous story of Tom Wolfe in Eddie Greenlaw's English class. We eighteen-year-old students were asked to write a short theme, the title of which was to be "My Life." Now, what do you think about a youngster eighteen or nineteen years old writing about his life's history? At any rate, we all had to do it because it was part of the assignment. When we brought the biographies to class, Tom came stumbling in late as usual and crawled into the back row. He was called on to read his life history, whereupon Tom reached into his right-hand pocket and pulled out a roll of toilet paper on which he had written the story of his life. And, of

course, it was very witty and excellent, and the English was perfect — it always was in Tom's case. Eddie Greenlaw, who had quite a sense of humor himself, said, "Thomas, the quality of your story as you read it to us reflects very much the type of paper that it's written on."

Now, Tom was a good friend of mine, we met on frequent occasions, and we met in France for a couple of days. We visited the battlefields together. Marcus Noble, Tom Wolfe, and myself got together and one other person, whose name I don't recall. We spent two days together. Tom always had cheese under one elbow and a flask of wine or carafe of wine under the other. Of course, that didn't suit Frank Graham very well, but it suited Mark Noble and myself admirably. We had a nice time together.

I kept up with him over the years, mostly by correspondence, and some of my letters — I am proud to say — are ensconced in that pile on top of that little wagon here in the North Carolina Collection. I gave them to the University — and, incidentally, I got a very nice tax deduction by reason of it. Well, I'm glad they are here, because they are well taken care of and they will be preserved a whole lot better than I could have preserved them.

There was only one instance in which I beat Tom Wolfe. After we graduated, the class met under the old Davie Poplar to elect a permanent president. I beat Tom Wolfe by two votes!

RALPH D. WILLIAMS, '20

[Mr. Williams provided the following written substitute for remarks he made during the "Memories of Wolfe" session.]

In 1921 or 1922 Tom Wolfe, B. C. Brown, and possibly others came to New York in an effort to raise funds for the Edward Kidder Graham Memorial Building. We, the young alumni living in New York, worked with them in trying to pick the pockets of well-established alumni — in-

cluding George Gordon Battle, well-known attorney; Junius Parker, chief counsel for American Tobacco Company; Rufus Patterson, chief executive officer of American Machine and Foundry; John Motley Morehead, industrialist; Alf Haywood, attorney; and others. A few of the young alumni had dinner as guests of the fundraisers; guests included John Terry, Elliot Cooper, George Denny, and possibly others. The restaurant, no longer in operation, was next door to the McAlpin Hotel, 34th Street and Broadway, where the fundraisers were staying. We were on the second floor of the restaurant, and the waiter had to make several trips up and down stairs. As we were leaving I looked back over my shoulder and saw the waiter picking up first one and then another napkin and slamming each one down a little harder than the preceding one. He was furious; no one had left a tip. It was quite some time before I went back to that restaurant.

One evening after Tom had moved to New York, I was in his apartment in the middle fifties on Lexington Avenue. Furnishings included a white iron bed, a chest of drawers, a couple of chairs, and a large, bare, round table about three feet in diameter. That was about all. A large pile — about half a bushel — of unopened letters was stacked on the table. I remarked: "Tom you seem to be behind with your correspondence." He answered, "If you don't read them you don't have to answer them."

One evening when I was with Dr. Eugene Sugg (from a few miles west of Chapel Hill on what is now Highway #54 but practicing in New York City), we were discussing alumni in the area and he said he had never met Tom. I arranged for Tom and Eugene to have dinner with me at the Columbia University Club at 4 West 43rd Street. The appointment was for six o'clock. At seven o'clock Tom had not arrived. I telephoned and woke him up. He hurried over from his apartment on Lexington Avenue. We sat down at a table for four in the bar and grill section and were soon voluntarily joined by Lewis Arnold — an Englishman who spoke slowly in very crisp, measured words with very little lip movement. He immediately took over the conversation and very soon pulled from his pocket newspaper clippings and started reading about his brother who was a member of the British Parliament, representing the Labour Party. In less than three minutes Tom looked at his watch and said: "We had better be going or we will be late." Tom did not want to play second fiddle in any conversation. I had expected we would have dinner at the club but was pleased that Tom had saved us from listening to a slow conversation about something in which we had no interest. We went to the Blue Rib-

bon Restaurant in the 45th Street area between Sixth Avenue and Broadway, one of Tom's favorites in that neighborhood.

When Tom returned from one of his early trips to Europe, he invited some of his Carolina contemporaries to meet him at the Harvard Club, 27 West 44th Street, about noon on Sunday. Except for the absence of B. C. Brown the group was about the same as had been with him for dinner when he was in New York raising funds for the Graham Memorial Building. Nat Mobley, one of his fraternity brothers, had moved to New York by that time and was probably with the group. We moved on from the Harvard Club to the Blue Ribbon Restaurant (mentioned above) at about one o'clock. Tom was in fine form discussing his European trip. It is my recollection that his comparatively short haircut was due to an incident in a German beer parlor where he had been conked on the head with a beer mug, and the haircut was necessary before some stitches could be taken in the repair work.

It is also my recollection that it was on the return trip mentioned in the preceding paragraph that he met Aline Bernstein, a married woman with whom he was closely associated for several years. I have no recollection of that subject having been mentioned at the luncheon while I was there. The meeting is described in some detail in one of his books, *The Web and the Rock*. He first saw her as he stood at the rail of his ocean-going vessel as her tender approached to put some passengers aboard. I do not remember the port.

As the afternoon wore on, most other guests left the restaurant, but Tom continued to hold the attention of his guests. The waiters gradually moved in nearer to hear better as they pretended to be rearranging place settings at nearby tables. I had to leave about four-thirty but Tom seemed to be gaining speed and showed no sign of reaching a terminal in reviewing his European trip and related subjects. The thing I have always remembered about the luncheon was the close attention his friends (and waiters) paid to his conversation, which was not aimed at capturing their attention but was simply the contagious enthusiasm generated by what he had seen and done.

When *Fortune* — or a similar publication — was issued in breadpan size (about 10" x 15" x 1"), an article by Tom described the campaign of a candidate for governor of North Carolina. I remember the article for two reasons: for one reason the pages were cut (when printed) lengthwise down the middle; the second reason: I could identify the candidate and his advisor on rural economic problems although no actual names were used.

The candidate was O. Max Gardner, and Tom described him as stuffing the keyhole and putting a rug against the door at floor level as he knelt to pray for his own success in the campaign. His advisor on rural economics was clearly Dr. Eugene C. Branson of the University faculty. Both were ridiculed by Tom with tongue-in-cheek treatment.

In 1967 Andrew Turnbull wrote a biography of Tom Wolfe. At his request we met for dinner while he was writing the book. We went to the Blue Ribbon Restaurant and had a very pleasant discussion of my recollections of Tom at the University and in New York. I have no clear memory of the details of our conversation, but when the book came out I was impressed by the great number of alumni — and others — listed in four pages of acknowledgments, strung out one name right after another.

Someone has said that no man is a hero to his close associates. I concluded that I should revise my measurements of "Buck Gavin," my classmate, when Sinclair Lewis — one of the leading authors of the 1920s — said that Tom Wolfe was an outstanding young writer who would achieve recognition for the depth and excellence of his writing.

WILLIAM H. ANDREWS, '20

Paul Green told about being initiated in the Sigma Upsilon and how badly he was beaten. I was initiated the same night that Tom Wolfe was, and we were down near the Bynum Gymnasium, on all fours, and we were beaten in the rear end so that we could not sit down for about a week.

The summer after we graduated, I went up to Asheville for a few days, and I saw Tom, and we went around to the Old Kentucky Home. I met his mother and sister, and I enjoyed visiting with Tom.

The next time I saw Tom was in New York in October 1923. My wife and I were on our honeymoon and we stayed at the old Waldorf-Astoria. There was a restaurant right across the street that advertised good

Southern cooking. So we went in there. We had barely sat down when Tom Wolfe came in. He joined us, and we enjoyed visiting with him. The next night we were the guests of Kameichi Kato, who was a schoolmate of ours; his father owned a steamship line from Tokyo to New York.

I saw him again in the summer of 1937. We had taken our son up to Brevard to a summer camp, and stopped at Oteen to get some gas. When I went into the gas station to sign my ticket, there was a great big tall man on the telephone. It sounded like Tom Wolfe, but he had grown about two or three inches taller, and he had gotten nearer 250 pounds. I just waited until he got through, and he turned around and recognized me. I asked him what he was doing there, and he said he had a place about three miles up the mountain. I asked him how did he get down there, and he said he walked. I said, "Get in our car and we'll take you back up there." So we took him up to the cabin. The first thing he did was pull out a section of a davenport and got a jug of corn liquor. He said, "This is the best liquor you will ever taste. I know a fellow up here that ran this through his still eight times. You don't need a chaser on it." He was right. I asked him what he was doing up there, and he said he was working on a book, and he showed us the manuscript. It must have been that thick! He said he was supposed to cut out about half of it. I was impressed.

Somebody commented about Tom's stuttering. Tom was always seeking for exactly the right word to express his feelings, so it wasn't a question of his stuttering, it was a question of searching for the right word. Well, he was a great fellow!

KATHERINE ROBINSON EVERETT, '20

I have nothing to add. I was in the law school and Tom of course was in academics. I did know him, and I saw him act, but these brilliant speakers knew him intimately, and I don't want to take their time. I am delighted to be here to share their memories.

VANCE E. SWIFT, '20

[Mr. Swift provided the following written substitute for the remarks he made during the "Memories of Wolfe" session.]

The Thomas Wolfe that I knew as a classmate at the University of North Carolina during the years 1916-1920 was not the flamboyant unkempt eccentric slob that he so often has been portrayed by some of his biographers who, not having known him during his undergraduate days at Chapel Hill, have attempted to paint a composite "on the Hill" picture of Wolfe from descriptions found in his autobiographical novel, *Look Homeward, Angel.* It appears, in fact, that many of his biographers, including Andrew Turnbull, Elizabeth Nowell, and others, in their effort to piece together a true picture of Wolfe from his writings, have failed to differentiate between the real Wolfe and the fictional Wolfe described in *Look Homeward, Angel.* They apparently have identified the fictional character, Eugene Gant, in *Look Homeward, Angel* as the real Thomas Wolfe, and thus have failed to differentiate between the fictional Eugene Gant and the real Thomas Wolfe.

Eugene Gant, the main character in *Look Homeward, Angel,* was a combination of the real Thomas Wolfe and the fictional Wolfe called Eugene Gant. In those instances where the real Thomas Wolfe failed to meet the specifications of the character that the author sought to portray, Wolfe did not hesitate to resort to fiction in creating, in Eugene Gant, the character that he sought to portray of himself in his autobiographical novel *Look Homeward, Angel.*

While I have never been a Wolfe scholar, was not a close personal friend of his at Chapel Hill, and did not follow his progress as a writer after he went to New York, I did get to know him quite well and to admire him as an outstanding student classmate. I got to know Wolfe during our first year at Chapel Hill through our mutual friends, Edmund J. Burdick from Asheville, and another brilliant student, I believe his name was Leslie Eugene Sluder, from Brevard, N.C., both of whom were forc-

ed to withdraw from the University due to terminal illness at or near the close of my second year at Chapel Hill.

In those days "bull sessions" were commonplace among students at the University and, on occasion, I used to join Wolfe, Burdick, and Sluder at their rooming house in "bull sessions" on various subjects, including sessions on English assignments.

The assignment that I remember best, because it was the most important English assignment of the year, was to write a theme on "Who I Am," which was to be something of an "autobiographical thesis." After having learned from upperclassmen that the best grades in the past had gone to those students who had resorted to fiction rather than fact to describe significant episodes in their lives, Wolfe, Sluder, and I decided to resort to fiction and to make our stories sufficiently dramatic as to be interesting, but without being so unrealistic as to reveal the fact that it was fiction rather than fact.

Wolfe, as I recall, wrote what we all thought was exaggerated dramatic fiction about the hilarious and terrifying episodes encountered with his rambunctious drunken father. We thought the episodes as he described them were so dramatic and unrealistic that the professor would recognize the whole story as fiction rather than fact, and we told him so.

I do not recall that Wolfe's theme was ever published, but the one written by Sluder which described his experience as a National Guardsman on the Mexican border during the bandit Villa's raids, won top honors and was published in *Carolina Magazine*, a UNC student magazine.

In one of our early "bull sessions" held at the Andrews House, I recall that Wolfe talked about his abortive plans to attend the University of Virginia where he had hoped to have contact with the aristocratic "first families" of Virginia, the state of his mother's ancestors. Instead of Virginia, Wolfe's father insisted on his going to the less "snooty" and more democratic University of North Carolina where he would associate with, and be recognized socially, by North Carolina students from all social and economic levels in the state and thus provide contacts that would be of value to him in his future business or political career.

In the days prior to our entry into World War I, the social life at the University of North Carolina was dominated mainly by the old-line fraternities whose membership, numbering less than 10 percent of the student body, was composed primarily of descendants and close friends of the once wealthy aristocratic antebellum landed gentry of the East, along with an increasing number of sons of the newly rich industrialists of the Pied-

mont and the West. Wolfe was not one of them and sometimes was made to feel ill at ease by upperclassmen from each of these groups.

Before the inactivation of fraternities occasioned by our entry into World War I, class distinction was beginning to develop between fraternity and nonfraternity members on the campus, resulting in some cases, in downright hostility. There was very little fraternization between fraternity and nonfraternity members, and not many students outside the circle of friends and relatives of members, and former fraternity members, received bids to join old-line fraternities. Having no genealogical or ancestral fraternity lineage, Wolfe, like many others with no lineal or collateral fraternity ancestors, found the doors to the University's upper social life closed to him, so he initiated an offensive against the fraternity "caste" system under which the fraternities operated. He did this in part by ridiculing fraternities and the haughty attitude of their members who, according to Wolfe, sat like vultures on their porches along "fraternity row" looking down their noses with an air of superiority on nonfraternity students as they walked past fraternity houses on their way to and from classes. These same fraternity students generally gazed upward into the sky and pretended not to see nonfraternity students as they met and passed along the graveled walkways.

In the days before World War I fraternities generally did not observe what later was to become known as "rush season," a period during which fraternities sought to recruit and pledge new members by entertaining them and generally courting their favor. Instead, a system in those days, called "booting" or "bootlicking," was in evidence, a system under which "neophytes" attempted to curry favor on the part of fraternities by entertaining their members frequently and lavishly. This sort of action sometimes extended over a period of years only to culminate eventually in a final "blackball" except in a few cases where the fraternity, being in need of money, would accept the student and arrange for him to be initiated a few days before graduation in order for the fraternity to collect the initiation fee.

Wolfe abhorred this kind of action, and soon after the reactivation of fraternities following the close of World War I, Wolfe participated actively in a move among student leaders to break up the stranglehold of the aristocratic old-line fraternities on the social life of the University campus by organizing local groups of outstanding students into local fraternities and then petitioning well-established national fraternities for a charter. The move had the full backing of the University, and soon charters were

granted to local groups and the number of strong national fraternities was doubled. Thus the stranglehold by the few old-line aristocratic fraternities on the social life at the University was broken. As I recall it, Wolfe was a leader in one of the first locals to receive a charter.

Having been forced by his father to attend the University of North Carolina rather than the University of Virginia, the school of his choice, Wolfe likened his situation to that of Jonathan (Dean) Swift, an orphan, who was adopted by his uncle, Godfrey Swift, an attorney general in Ireland, and forced to live in Ireland, a country he later came to dislike. At the age of six, Jonathan's uncle sent him to Kilkenny school, called the Eton of Ireland, where, as an orphan among the elite families of nobility and great wealth, Swift sometimes was made to feel ill at ease. This may have engendered some bitterness in his life that later on found expression in his satirical writings which disclosed that he cherished a resentment against not only his uncle but the whole human race.

Wolfe expressed admiration of Swift's writings and allowed as how someday he, Tom Wolfe, would write a satire equal to *Gulliver's Travels* in which he would portray the "little people," meaning the "nonaristocratic" people, as heroes over the "Aristocratic Giants." *Look Homeward, Angel* and *You Can't Go Home Again* may have been a later expression of Wolfe's pent-up feelings about his family, his friends, the common people, the aristocrats, and the whole human race.

As I stated in the beginning, the Thomas Wolfe that I knew as a classmate at Chapel Hill was a likeable, congenial, well-groomed young student who loved to associate with other students and people everywhere, but he was one who held in contempt the haughty self-styled aristocratic students who looked down their nose at him and at others whom they considered to fall below their own economic and self-proclaimed social status.

On one occasion, I recall that Wolfe, as an act of ridicule, tousled his hair, rolled up his trouser legs to midway his ankles, disarranged his necktie and, staring up at the sky, walked nonchalantly down the gravel walkway along fraternity row while members sat on their porches staring up at the sky.

Wolfe was an incessant talker and, though he was well informed on many subjects, he did not let his lack of knowledge of a given subject stand in his way of discussing it as enthusiastically as if he were an expert on the subject. I sometimes thought that he was prone to exaggerate in discussing some subjects, especially in reciting what appeared to me to be

wild tales of his escapades. Sometimes he would fabricate a wild story to test the ability of his listeners to judge fiction from fact.

Wolfe's mother ran a boarding house in the summer resort town of Asheville, which was frequented in summer by wealthy visitors mainly from the South, who came there to play and to escape the summer heat. This fact, along with the fact that he was not embraced by students from the wealthy elite families from Asheville and environs, such as the Binghams, McKees, Colemans, and other Asheville socialites, may have given Wolfe a feeling of inferiority or resentment. It may also have engendered a burning desire on his part someday to soar above them and obscure their social status with the literary and dramatic fame which he hoped and expected to achieve.

After the deaths of Burdick and Sluder, I saw very little of Wolfe. My time and interest centered in the field of science, medicine, and athletics, while Wolfe's interest was in literature and drama. Although I kept in touch with Wolfe through mutual friends such as Sidney Allen, George Denny, George Taylor, Hobart Souther, and others, I had a full schedule in the Medical School, and was also a member of the varsity baseball team. This made it necessary for me to spend long hours in the medical school laboratories at night in order to make up work that I had missed during afternoons spent on the athletic field and on out-of-town trips with the baseball team.

Obviously, Wolfe was a different character at Harvard and New York University from the Wolfe I knew during our first two years at Chapel Hill. (I saw very little of him during my last two years at the University.) I lost track of him after he left Chapel Hill and I heard little or nothing of him until after the publication of his autobiographical novel, *Look Homeward, Angel*, when I happened to mention Wolfe and his novel at a dinner party given by my neighbor Lawrence Stallings and his wife, Helen Poteat, at their "Forest Hills" home in Caswell County. This was my first discussion of Wolfe with anyone who had known and associated with him in New York, and I was astounded and shocked to hear Mrs. Stallings refer to him as an undesirable, uncouth, eccentric person to be avoided. Others at the party, as well as I can recall, included Walter Lippman and a staff writer from *Time* Magazine, who knew Wolfe. All agreed that Wolfe was something of a literary genius who, somehow along the way in the process of becoming a famous writer, had degenerated into an eccentric, unkempt alcoholic.

Some years later in discussing Wolfe with Hamilton Basso, a friend of Wolfe and a member of the Roosevelt Commission on Farm Tenancy and the Economic Problems of the South, I learned that Wolfe had evidenced a compassion for the downtrodden people living in the North Carolina mountains. Basso, who spent his summers at Brevard, said that he knew Wolfe well in New York and in North Carolina, and that he thought perhaps Wolfe might have had visions of becoming a second Edgar Allen Poe, George Bernard Shaw, or Jonathan Swift. He went on to say, however, that Wolfe was a literary genius who someday would take his rightful place in the "Literary Hall of Fame."

My cousin, Janie Swift Sharp, now in her late nineties, and whose late husband knew Wolfe as a customer who frequented their bookstore on Pack Square in Asheville, thought that the people in Asheville, and in North Carolina in general, were unkind to Wolfe because they lacked the vision to recognize and appreciate a great novelist until after literary critics all over the world began to acclaim him as a great satirist. People in Asheville, according to Mrs. Sharp, thought of Wolfe as a local "home-grown" youth, and could not conceive of a local boy becoming a great writer.

But North Carolinians, especially the North Carolina press, have always been slow and reluctant to praise a native son for outstanding achievement. Whether it is lack of vision, lack of appreciation, jealousy, or timidity, North Carolinians have not been prone to praise their native sons and daughters.

Instead of praise, we have been quick to criticize the efforts, especially the literary efforts of our sons and daughters. Early criticism by North Carolinians and the North Carolina press of *Look Homeward, Angel*, and Thomas Wolfe, the author, was no exception; and it was not until Wolfe had received worldwide acclaim as a great novelist that we in North Carolina came to recognize and accept him as a literary genius.

CORYDON P. SPRUILL, '20

I would like to add a very small note, but I think a significant one, that is implicit in much that's been said this afternoon and much more that's been written and said previously. And that is a note on the gentler and quieter affection and good feeling that Tom so often displayed. As a person of universal imagination, feeling, and emotion, he went through a range far exceeding my imagination, of course. I was impressed then and in retrospect am even more impressed about this quieter, private person, who Tom Wolfe was occasionally. Just two illustrations perhaps I may be allowed to mention.

One is that he learned, in 1921, I think it was, that my fiancée and her sister were going to take a trip to Boston — my wife's first trip and her sister's second or third trip. They went up to see friends. Tom learned about it, and he drafted a fellow student from the graduate school to go down to the boat to meet them. He took charge of them; he took them to breakfast, took them to lunch, took them out to the football field, took them all around, and delivered them to their host. And all because of his feeling for these two comparative strangers from North Carolina and one of them a fiancée of a classmate of his.

Sixteen years later Tom came to Chapel Hill in 1937 and I had the privilege of taking him to some of the places he wished to see and some of the people he wished to visit. One of them was to answer the invitation of Phillips Russell to attend his class, which was then in Murphey Hall in the auditorium — and a big class. Tom and I came back rather late for the class, because he wanted to go to Durham to see some people at Duke, which we did; and we arrived at Murphey in the middle of the class. We cracked the door, and I asked Tom to go ahead in. I thought he would go right on down as soon as Mr. Russell recognized him. Professor Russell did stop what he was saying, in the middle of a sentence, perhaps in the middle of a word, and indicated that he would be pleased if Tom would come forward. But Tom just lurched over to a chair and sat down very quickly and asked Russell to please go ahead, which Phillips did and

which I silently applauded. It strikes me now that this is something that we all feel and we all know and that ought to be mentioned explicitly, and I do bring it forward with my appreciation and applause.

R. HOBART SOUTHER, '20

If my memory served me better, I could really tell some good stories. Legette Blythe of Charlotte asked me at Sunday school some years ago to write down on a piece of paper the jokes that Tom Wolfe told around the class meeting at the Oaks. I said, "I don't remember any of them." He said, "You ought to for you laughed louder than anybody else there!"

One time I met Tom in New York in front of the McAlpin Hotel. I was going to register, and two friends were with me from Greensboro. I was going out to Long Island to have dinner with them. I saw Tom coming down the street. We have heard a lot about how Tom dressed. When I saw him coming, I thought "My goodness, here's poor Tom." Remember, these were the days of the depression. I thought I'd have to give him a loan. We greeted each other and I introduced him to my two friends. I asked "What have you been doing in the meantime?" He said he was teaching at NYU. I jumped back and thought, "My goodness, NYU can afford to pay better salaries than this, and he could dress a little better." He told me that he'd been to Harvard and got a master's degree, and then he told me the story that Ben Cone told you about — that he had been to Flanders Field with Ben Cone, Frank Graham, Marcus Cicero Stephens Noble. I believe there was someone else he mentioned. And then he begged me to spend the night with him. He said, "I'm staying at the Harvard Club, and the next time you come up, call me at the Harvard Club." I did, about the next summer, but he'd moved, leaving no forwarding address. I think he moved over to Brooklyn. If I'd known then what I know now, I could have found him. I'm sorry I didn't get to see him anymore.

Jayne Mansfield, the actress, was in Greensboro once, and we had a running conversation. I asked her if she was in college at Texas in 1960. I said, "You beat us in Austin, but we beat you in Chapel Hill." She slapped her hands and said, "I wasn't on the team that year." Then I asked her, "Did you ever read any of Thomas Wolfe's books?" She said, "I read everything he wrote, and everything written about him." I told her that he was a classmate of mine and he asked me to spend the night with him in New York afterward. "Oh, you ought to have spent the night with a famous author like that," she said. And I said to Miss Mansfield, "If he had introduced me to a good looking blonde like you, I'm sure if something had happened, I'd have been written up in his next book."

Wolfe's biographer came to town, and I told him that story. He asked if I thought that Jayne would like Tom Wolfe. I said that from what I've heard, she certainly would have. He told me about that beautiful Boston winter in New York when I saw him. I'm sorry I didn't get to see him anymore, but there's one joke that I would like to finish with. I think he told this at the class reunion. I know that I wasn't planning to go. The tickets were a little stiff, but when I was told that Tom was going to respond to the faculty toast, I said, "Let me have one of those tickets; I wouldn't miss that for anything in the world." I think one of the stories he told was about an absent-minded professor who was going to make a Fourth of July oration. He couldn't remember the names of places and dates, so he wrote names down on the inside of his pocket — like this. He said, "Who was it in that memorable year of 1492, who discovered this great country of ours? None other than that great explorer and discoverer — Christopher Columbus. And who was it that was the founding father of our country, and got us free from the tyrannies of Great Britain? None other than that great statesman — George Washington. And who saved this great union in times of civil strife? None other than that great emancipator, Abraham Lincoln. And in whom must we put our trust today, if we are to go forward as a great nation? None other than our good Lord and Savior — Hart, Schaffner and Marx."

MOSES ROUNTREE, '20

[Mr. Rountree, a classmate of Thomas Wolfe, could not attend the session on "Memories of Wolfe," but he supplied the following written statement.]

I first saw Thomas Wolfe in January 1919 when I returned to the University of North Carolina following wartime service in the United States Navy. I had dropped out of the University in 1916, at the end of my junior year, to take a job with the *Wilson Daily Times*, but I was enabled to return through the good services of Secretary of the Navy Josephus Daniels, who issued an order that anyone desiring to resume a college education could get out of the Navy. I had signed up in the regular Navy for four years.

I was at a table in the Alumni Building trying to map out what courses to take in my major, English. I asked a lanky, personable young fellow sitting at the table if he had any suggestions.

"Take Koch's playwriting, by all means," he said. "It's great."

So I followed the suggestion of Thomas Wolfe and joined the disciples of "Proff" Frederick H. Koch, who had come to Chapel Hill the preceding fall from the University of North Dakota, where he had founded a similar theatrical group.

The playwriting course was an innovative change from anything I had had before. Instead of the dusty classrooms of Old East and Old West, the Playmakers had a bright meeting place off the rotunda of the library. There were a large slick-top table and comfortable chairs, instead of benches. To give an authoritative atmosphere, the walls were lined with playbills and pictures of Koch's Dakota Playmakers. There were one or two bookcases filled with volumes on drama.

Koch sat at one end of the table, framed in sunlight from a window. He was a dapper, tweedy little man with a penchant for Norfolk jackets and artists' ties. He wore pince-nez glasses which he used to punctuate his remarks. He had a sparkle in his eyes and great enthusiasm for his cause —

the establishment of a new native theater. It would make use of the state's rich heritage of folklore and tradition. Hopefully it would spread to other parts of the country and rescue the theater from its shallow Broadway image.

The aspiring playwrights who sat around the table shared Koch's fervor. There were Elizabeth Lay, no less gifted than her husband-to-be, Paul Green; Elizabeth Taylor, an accomplished player of senior roles; beauteous Virginia McFadden, the sharecropper's daughter, who would marry a Broadway producer; Harold Williamson, the country lad, who brought homey realism to the tragedy of the tenant farmer.

Then there was Thomas Wolfe, the thwarted dramatist, who would end up being a novelist.

Wolfe was the life of the class and its most assiduous member. He had an inexhaustible fund of humor and was constantly getting laughs with his wisecracking. Anything for a laugh.

One day Koch inquired if it had been one of us whose serious mien had been remarked on by Hamlin Garland, the novelist. Garland, whose autobiographical *A Son of the Middle Border* was winning popularity, had been invited by Dr. Eddie Greenlaw to address his class in advanced composition, English 21.

Wolfe and myself were the only playmakers taking the course. I could well imagine Garland was referring to me. I had given him rapt attention, never having seen a real author before.

Koch was smiling in my direction and I expected him at any moment to say, "How about it, Rountree?"

Then, to my immense relief, Wolfe blurted out, "I guess he was talking about me, Proff. I am the serious type, you know."

There was a round of laughter and I breathed easy again.

I have sometimes wondered if Wolfe's joshing wasn't a mask to conceal his inner torture that would crystalize later in *Look Homeward, Angel.*

At the time he projected a seriocomic image. A gangling youth of eighteen, he was a loose combination of legs, arms, big hands, and a small head that seemed a mismatch for his six-foot, three-inch frame. In class he sat hunched forward, supported by his elbows. His dark hair was tousled and his clothes looked rumpled, as if he had slept in them — which doubtless he had, on occasion.

It was said that he sat up all night scribbling a one-act play. He would come on class the next morning bleary-eyed and disheveled, and, assembling his hastily written manuscript, proceed to read it to the class. The

manuscript was usually a hodgepodge of notepaper, envelopes, or whatever he could lay his hands on.

Despite his unorthodox system, there was no questioning his talent. He had a flair for the dramatic and facility for writing dialogue and creating scenes. He was also a born actor, as displayed in his *The Return of Buck Gavin*, produced in Koch's first bill of one-act plays. He had the lead role, that of a mountain outlaw, and scored a big hit with his lusty portrayal.

Flushed with success, Wolfe got busy writing another play with a similar theme, but it wound up in the *University Magazine*, as did others he pounded out. He had one more play produced before going to Harvard to pursue his dream under famed drama professor George Pierce Baker. The dream never materialized. It took a woman with higher dramatic skills than Wolfe's to bring *Look Homeward, Angel* to Broadway and win a Pulitzer prize.

Wolfe would have been less pleased than offended. He had scorned the suggestion of a woman member that the Neighborhood Playhouse of New York would produce a play he wrote at Harvard — *Welcome to Our City* — if he would make certain alterations. Who the hell did she think she was to know more about his play than he did, Wolfe wrote the woman.

I was willing to concede Wolfe's superiority as a dramatist, but he had to barge in on my territory by getting verse in the *University Magazine*. I considered myself the University's poet laureate emeritus. I had written verse for the magazine since my sophomore year. I had written an ode celebrating the inauguration of President Edward Kidder Graham and had been awarded the English Department's prize for the best verse published in 1915-16. Wolfe was infringing on my rights.

In the spring of 1919, fresh out of the Navy, I contributed a piece (titled *New York, Ahoy!*) to the magazine. It described a sailor's reaction upon seeing the Statue of Liberty after months at sea. It was acclaimed by the *Tar Heel* critic for its realism and the verse form used.

I followed up by getting two poems in a College Wits editions of *Judge*, the national humor weekly; one of them was copied by New York columnist Franklin P. Adams (F.P.A.) in his *Conning Tower*.

Because of my splurge, I was named to the advisory board of the *Tar Baby*, campus humor magazine, and invited to join Sigma Upsilon, the University's literary fraternity. The formal invitation came from Wolfe,

himself. I was to appear on a certain night at the fraternity's meeting room in the South Building for initiation.

Upon my arrival, I was blindfolded and led out of the building. What dark doings lay in store, I wondered. Supported by Wolfe, I was walked along in silence. Campus sounds grew fainter and fainter, suggesting we were headed out of town. After what seemed an hour, the procession suddenly halted and Wolfe said, "Well, Rountree, this is where you get it."

The blindfold was removed and I found myself standing in the middle of a cemetery. Peering into the darkness I saw the initiation detail grouping in a semicircle. They looked menacing.

"Have you got your paddles, boys?" Wolfe asked. Before they could answer, he said, "I don't think Rountree could stand much paddling. Since he is a poet, we will let him give us a recitation. Are you familiar with *An Elegy Written in a Country Graveyard*, Rountree?"

"I remember some of it," I responded. The Gray classic had been one of my favorites in high school.

"All right, get up on that gravestone and cut loose," Wolfe said.

I planted myself on the low stone and began reciting:

"The curfew tolls the knell of parting day,

The lowing herd winds slowly o'er the lea—"

"Put some expression in it, Rountree," Wolfe interrupted. "You're not reciting prose."

I raised my voice slightly and resumed:

"The plowman homeward plods his weary way,

And leaves the world to darkness and to me."

Wolfe let me go on, testing my memory. When I came to "The rude forefathers of the hamlet sleep," he broke in with "You don't do the rude forefathers justice, Rountree."

Taking over the recitation, he sonorously went through verse after verse of the poem, licking his chops on such lines as "The short and simple annals of the poor," "The paths of glory lead but to the grave," and "And waste its sweetness on the desert air."

I decided he had plotted the whole episode to impress me with his versatility.

Sessions of the fraternity were devoted to criticizing each other's compositions and reading literary works. On one occasion Wolfe read portions of Shaw's *Arms and the Man*. He was captivated by Shaw's satiric

humor and attempted a comedy satire of his own before settling for Koch's plain fare.

Wolfe reached his stride in Greenlaw's English 21. He called the gruff, exacting Greenlaw one of his "great" teachers. A native of Illinois with a Ph.D. from Harvard, Greenlaw was fired "with a zeal for good teaching." He detested superficial thinking and shoddy work. Students had to extend themselves to win his grudging approval. Wolfe welcomed the challenge.

Early in 1919, Greenlaw embarked English 21 on its most ambitious project, a mock peace conference to settle the issues of World War I. The class was divided into delegations representing the different allied countries involved. Wolfe was one of five representatives of the United States. He also headed the Commission of Indemnities and was a member of the Commission on Freedom of the Seas. I was on the French delegation.

The first order of business was a study of the historical background of the war as it related to the countries involved. What issues were at stake and how could they be resolved in a peace treaty?

There was unanimous agreement that Germany must be demilitarized and her empire broken up. The conference voted to strip her of her overseas possessions and segments of her European territory. Wolfe supported a demand by France for the return of Alsace-Lorraine, with a tribute to Lafayette and Franco-American ties. "Good-bye Broadway, hello France!" was still ringing in everybody's ears.

It was generally agreed that France should share heavily in reparations. The war had been fought largely on her soil and she had suffered enormous casualties. As at Versailles, there was a consensus that Germany should be made to pay to the hilt. Wolfe's Commission on Indemnities came up with staggering billions and the conference went along.

The class project was completed in twelve weeks, well ahead of the peace treaty at Versailles. Greenlaw, who had been pleased with the work of the group, invited the class to his home for a celebration. Copies of the treaty were circulated on the campus and sent to leading newspapers. The *New York Times* suggested editorially that it might not be a bad idea to adopt the student treaty, that it was probably as good as anything that would come out of Versailles. The New York Public Library ordered a copy for its files.

The last I saw of Wolfe was at the 1920 commencement. That fall I sent him an announcement of my marriage to a Goldsboro girl. He ac-

knowledged it with a wedding gift — a little silver pickle fork. He probably could have used the money to his own advantage.

The years went by and suddenly Wolfe had become famous with the publication of *Look Homeward, Angel.* I lost no time getting a copy. Skipping over the early chapters, I looked for what he had to say about Chapel Hill. Suddenly, in his account of his junior year, "Mr. Rountree" stared me in the face. It had to be me. I was the only Rountree at the University and Wolfe had remembered there was no "d" in my name — a common misspelling.

The passage, inserted without introduction on pages 594 and 595, had to do with a purported conversation in the philosophy class of Professor Horace Williams (Vergil Weldon in the book). Students were asked what they would have done had they been in Galileo's place, when he was forced to recant his position that the earth moved around the sun or be burned at the stake.

> "And if they had asked you, Mr. Rountree?"
>
> "I'd have told the truth," said Mr. Rountree, removing his glasses.
>
> "But they had built a good big fire, Mr. Rountree."
>
> "That doesn't matter," said Mr. Rountree, putting his glasses on again. How nobly we die for truth — in conversation.
>
> "It was a very hot fire, Mr. Rountree. They'd have burned you if you hadn't recanted."
>
> "Ah, I'd have let them burn," said the martyred Rountree through moistening spectacles.
>
> "I think it might be painful," Vergil Weldon suggested. "Even a little blister hurts."
>
> "Who wants to be burned for anything?" said Eugene. "I'd have done what Galileo did — backed out."
>
> "So should I," said Vergil Weldon, and their faces arched with gleeful malice over the heavy laughter of the class.

The passage was pure invention. I never took philosophy — it was not my dish.

I would have backed out faster than Galileo did.

Thanks, anyway, Tom, for putting me in your book, even as a cockeyed idealist.

Maybe you intended it as a compliment.

North Caroliniana Society, Inc.

North Carolina Collection
UNC Library 024-A
Chapel Hill, North Carolina 27514

Chartered on September 11, 1975, as a private nonprofit corporation under provisions of Chapter 55A of the *General Statutes of North Carolina,* the North Caroliniana Society has as its main purpose the promotion of increased knowledge and appreciation of North Carolina heritage through studies, publications, meetings, seminars, and other programs, especially through assistance to the North Carolina Collection of The University of North Carolina Library in the acquisition, preservation, care, use, and display of, and the promotion of interest in, historical and literary materials relating to North Carolina and North Carolinians. The Society, a tax-exempt organization under provisions of Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code, depends upon the contributions, bequests, and devises of its members and friends.

Unofficially limited to one hundred North Carolinians who have contributed significantly to the state, the Society elects additional individuals meeting its criterion of "adjudged performance," thus bringing together men and women who have shown their respect for and commitment to our state's unique historical, literary, and cultural inheritance.

A highlight of the Society's year is the presentation of the North Caroliniana Society Award to an individual adjudged to have given unusually distinguished service over a period of years to the encouragement, promotion, enhancement, production, and preservation of North Caroliniana.

The North Carolina Collection, the headquarters for the North Caroliniana Society, has been called the "Conscience of North Carolina," for it seeks to preserve for present and future generations all that has been or is published about the state and its localities and people or by North Carolinians, regardless of subject. In this mission the Collection's clientele is broader than the University community; indeed, it is the entire citizenry of North Carolina as well as those outside the state whose research extends to North Carolina or North Carolinians. Its acquisitions are made possible by gifts and private endowment funds; thus, it also represents the respect that North Carolinians have for their heritage. Members of the North Caroliniana Society have a very special relationship to this unique institution which traces its beginnings back to 1844 and which is unchallenged as the outstanding collection of printed North Caroliniana in existence. A leaflet, "North Carolina's Literary Heritage," is available without charge from the Collection.

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Thomas Wolfe at Chapel Hill
(Yackety Yack, 1920)